A STUDY OF PORTRAITS OF THE ARTIST IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION: CRITICAL SELFCONSCIOUSNESS AS A CHARACTERISING FEATURE OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY WRITING

MAGGIE GEE, M.A., B. Litt., (Oxon.)

(Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in January 1980.
Research conducted at the Polytechnic of Wolverhampton.)

ERRATA

p.400, line 8 : delete 'there' and insert on line 9 below i.e.
'there is 'an unwavering band of light...' '

p.432, a line of text is omitted after line 16 as follows:
'the Bibliography to <u>The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction</u>'

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

MAGGIE GEE

A STUDY OF PORTRAITS OF THE ARTIST IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION: CRITICAL SELFCONSCIOUSNESS AS A CHARACTERISING FEATURE OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY WRITING

This work examines the selfconscious novel, chiefly through the writing of Virginia Woolf, Vladimir Nabokov and Samuel Beckett. Self-conscious novels expose themselves as fictions rather than imitations of reality. Thus the art-work becomes a portrait of the artist who invents it, not a photographic study of the solid surfaces which enclose him. The selfconscious novel is also a portrait of art: it seeks to illuminate the nature of, and qualify belief in, all fictions.

My introductory survey insists that selfconsciousness is centrally important to postfeudal individualist culture. The rise of the novel was linked to the rise of the middle classes and the individual, the decline of absolute values and communal, corporate identity. Early novelists and contemporary philosophers thus grew to selfconsciousness as they dared to depend on individual empirical observation of the world. As social mobility and fragmentation increased, the individual thinker became ever more aware of the provisional nature of perception. The selfconscious novelist shares the insight of the nineteenth-century Idealist philosophers, that all accounts of the world, however 'true' or 'official', are a priori constructs, artificial and even fictional.

By portraying his own creative imagination at work the contemporary selfconscious author may offer a model for independent resistance to the new communal and corporate fictions which twentieth-century mass society propagates with such unparallelled efficiency. The fictions of institutionalised literary criticism are a relatively minor but interesting example, and the selfconscious author often does battle with his critics. However his primary aim is perhaps to portray the true nature of his own vocation in a century which often projects false fictional roles upon its artists, or else rejects them out of hand. Some of these themes will emerge in my discussion of Woolf, Nabokov and Beckett. In turn, the diversity of their work will illuminate the nature of, and qualify belief in, my own critical fictions.

CHAPTER 1

THE ARTIST LOOKS IN THE MIRROR AND SEES THE WORLD: SOME ORIGINS AND IMPLICATIONS OF SELFCONSCIOUSNESS

> There it was - her picture. Yes. With all its green and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something ... With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done: it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.
>
> Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (1927), 1930 edition, pp.319-320

> I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita.
>
> Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita (1955), 1959 edition, p.300

Both of these quotations, taken from the last pages of their respective works, show the artist reflecting on his image in the mirror, the image of a man who has made a world and is now at the end of his task. They share a mood of pride touched with ecstasy. But here is John Barth looking in a very different mirror:

> What a dreary way to begin a story he said to himself upon reviewing his long introduction ... the so-called 'vehicle' itself is at least questionable: self-conscious, vertiginously arch, fashionably solipsistic ... in fact a convention of twentieth-century literature. Another story about a writer writing a story! Another regressus in infinitum! Who doesn't prefer art that at least overtly imitates something other than its own processes? That doesn't continually proclaim 'Don't forget I'm an artifice!'? ... Though his critics sympathetic and otherwise described his own work as avant-garde, in his heart of hearts he disliked literature of an experimental, self-despising, or overtly metaphysical character...
>
> 'Life-Story', collected in Lost in the Funhouse (New York, 1968) pp.116-129 (p.117)

The image of the author that Barth sees fills him with anxiety, disgust and a paralysing terror of being unable to escape that watchful

reflection. Barth has not like the others triumphantly reached the end of his work: he is stuck at the very beginning, overpowered by his awareness of the critical perspective on what he is doing. These two moods represent polar extremes of the selfconscious artist at work.

A 'long introduction' may indeed be as John Barth suggests 'a dreary way to begin a story'. My story will for the most part be about three very different individual writers, Virginia Woolf, Vladimir Nabokov and Samuel Beckett: generalisations about literature are fallible things, but all the same my introduction will try to suggest ways in which the three writers are linked to each other, to a very important group of works in modern literature and to a central tendency of twentieth-century thought. Literature is polymorphous and rightly contemptuous of categories, which it will circumvent and evade whenever it can. Nevertheless I shall try to explain further some of the makeshift categories I use in the general title of this study, before I begin.

Recently the term 'selfconscious' has been applied more and more frequently to contemporary art by critics, and many a layman must be puzzled by the usage. If in everyday conversation we hear an individual described as 'selfconscious', the connotations are likely to be negative, though the attribute is more frequently looked on as an affliction than a vice. Artistic selfconsciousness is something related but different, and in this study I shall be discussing it especially in this century and in prose fiction. Despite the popular connotations of self-consciousness, I want to suggest that some of the works which I classify

as selfconscious are the best that this century has produced, as well as the most indicative of the state of our culture, and that they refer us back historically to some of the fundamentals of narrative. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg in their useful work The Nature of Narrative (1966) have reminded us of the essential constituents of the narrative act, something much wider than recent critical concentration on the novel form suggests. 'By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics, the presence of a story and a storyteller.'[1] Many of the most interesting recent writers of prose fiction try to evade familiar expectations of the novel and return us to basics in a similar fashion, but the element they have most emphasized in reframing their own definitions of narrative is the presence of the storyteller behind the story - a storyteller who is indeed most probably reframing his own definitions, one of Barth's 'regressus in infinitum'. They have pointed to their own significance as makers and masters of ceremony, asked their individual human readers to take into account the existence of counter-posed individual human authors behind the bland surface of the printed page through which the two make contact.

The motive is not egotism but a desire to illuminate the fabricated, fictional, artificial nature of the object they present. The self-conscious writer may be primarily concerned to alert his reader to the nature of literary convention, the way in which the existing body of literary texts conditions our expectations of his own, the way in which familiar literary modes of describing experience have come to shape our understanding of character, emotion, historical sequence, sometimes with deadening effect. He may also have an extraliterary purpose,

demonstrating to his reader how man constructs fictions that help him understand the world. This process is most usually communal, when a culture creates moral or political codes and internally coherent systems of knowledge. Moreover, it is usually covert, since it is to the advantage of the culture to pretend that moral codes and intellectual methodologies are not constructed and provisional but monolithic and absolutely true. When the solitary fiction-maker invites the reader to watch him at work, inventing and choosing from the infinite range of available phenomena, he may overtly or by analogy dissolve the proclaimed 'reality' and 'naturalness' of the cultural fictions which surround both reader and writer. He may also in his fiction-making activities offer a model of independent judgement and choice which will make the reader feel less impotent in the face of our mass myths. Selfconscious fiction at any rate asks for an active engagement with the writer's own text: it usually asks the reader to work like the author, to understand from the inside some of the problems of the mind which has recorded its patterns in print, and to consider how those problems are reflected in his own mental activity and the narrative of his own life.

To rephrase the notion of selfconsciousness, one might say that some of our most interesting current writers are overwhelmingly conscious of self, as shaping intellect, as wordsmith, as ambassador of an embattled literary culture, at times, as critic of that culture at others, as fallible human being adopting a god-like role, as representative human understanding seeking to grasp the rush and flux of experience: they are conscious of the dignity and responsibility of their artistic role, and sometimes also of its impossible difficulty leading in the

direction of painful farce. Dignity was perhaps easier to come by for the great selfconscious authors at the beginning of my chosen period, for Proust, Joyce and Woolf, though Nabokov also had it in full supply: difficulty is the keynote of many more sombrely self-conscious works from Beckett to Barth, and a desperate kind of farce. At either extreme, selfconsciousness is something quite different from the layman's kind: this is no casual discomfiture in the face of an audience. In the hands of two of the three artists who form the centre of this inquiry, Woolf and Nabokov, selfconsciousness is embarrassment turned completely inside out to show a rich and intricately self-assertive lining. In the case of Beckett the lining is just as rich in its assemblage of cultural references and linguistic texture, but it is deliberately gashed and shrivelled and torn to let the fear and horror of our century show through, and most of all to make manifest Beckett's real uncertainty and disgust about the status of literature in such a world. However, though selfconsciousness is always symptomatic of the pressures which the twentieth century's particular cultural conditions impose, all three writers manifest selfconsciousness as a decisive strategy, not an involuntary symptom.

It will be apparent that my category of the selfconscious novel is something looser and hopefully more capacious than the thing that David Lodge calls the 'problematic novel', in the first chapter of his <u>The Novelist at the Crossroads, and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism</u> (1971):

> To the novel, the non-fiction novel, and the fabulation, we must add a fourth category: the novel which exploits more than one of these modes without fully committing itself to any, the novel-about-itself, the trick-novel, the game-novel, the puzzle-novel, the novel that leads the reader ... through a fair-ground of illusions and deceptions, distorting mirrors and trapdoors ...(p.22)

Lodge's analysis of the object he has chosen is acute and suggestive, but it is really a subcategory of a wider tendency in modern literature. Nabokov fits very well into the category of the 'problematic novel', but in Woolf and in much of Beckett the playful exhibitionism which Lodge characterises is totally absent, and the game which the novel plays with its own making is fundamentally a grave one. Robert Alter in Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre (Berkeley, 1975) uses a definition of the selfconscious novel which is also in some respects like my own - 'A self-conscious novel, briefly, is a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and ... by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality' (Preface, p.x) - but once again there is a stronger emphasis upon the ebullient showmanship which is indeed a characterising feature of the practice of e.g. Sterne, Fielding, Nabokov, Kurt Vonnegut, John Fowles. To simplify a complex issue, I have probably laid more emphasis on the importance of the 'self' in selfconsciousness, seeing it as a phenomenon in this century essentially linked to the assertion of the individual writer as maker in a literary-critical world which under the influence of Henry James was hostile to authorial voice in fiction and in some respects is so again: in a culture, moreover, which sometimes seems hostile to individual freedom (see my pp.91-107). There are affinities with James MacFarlane and Malcolm Bradbury's catch-all title, 'The Introverted Novel', to their joint chapter in the anthology Modernism, where they trace back the contemporary novel's characteristic 'use of language and design, rather than contingency and imitation' and 'air, not only of internal difficulty, but of artistic crisis' to the aesthetic concerns of the early modernists.[2] However, I want to suggest that my selfconscious novels at their best are reflexive rather

than 'introverted', with its implications that the novel is solipsistic and has 'no ultimate extra-literary aims' - something Robert Alter asserts quite happily of his own kind of selfconscious fiction,[3] but which does not seem to me to do justice to the breadth of sympathy and commitment which the presentation of the shaping self in literature can entail. My category, then, errs on the side of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, but I am evidently talking about a phenomenon very like something several other critics of contemporary literature have thought worthy of mention, and the authors in our several descriptions often tend to be one and the same.

There are several ambiguities in the title of my work, and with the sanction of William Empson[4] I hope to insist they are fruitful ambiguities. First, my 'portraits of the artist' may also be 'portraits of the art-work', for they are portraits of the artist-at-work, not vignettes of the artistic temperament or the artistic life-style, the vie de bohème (a colourful line running through from Henri Murger to Henry Miller, but not one that concerns us here.) Often the artist does appear four-square on the stage of the selfconscious novel, in many guises and many moods, ranging from the earnest keeper of preliminary journals - Gide's Edouard in Les Faux-monnayeurs (1926) - through to the parody figure in a cocktail lounge watching his invented creatures through suspicious dark glasses - Kurt Vonnegut Junior's self-portrait, in Breakfast of Champions; or Goodbye Blue Monday! (1973).[5] As it happens my three central artists all introduce literal portraits of the artist to their pages. However there are many twentieth-century art-works which portray a problematic creator implicitly, through dramatising the process of their own construction. I think the relevance

of some of the remarks I shall make about portraits of the artist extends equally to these selfconscious works which house no incarnate creator-figures, but which nevertheless indicate their status as invented fiction by emphasizing their internally coherent patterning and their independence from the more random sequences of the real world. Thus for example many of Jorge Luis Borges' highly formal short prose pieces pose the enigma of their creator, and of a long tradition of creators, without actually bringing the artist on stage ('The Circular Ruins', 'The Gospel According to Saint Mark'.[6]) They are just as centrally concerned with art as other Borgesian pieces such as 'Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote' or 'Borges and I', where the artist engages his reader in direct debate.[7] The artist who interests me for the purposes of this study is not obviously heroic (as in Maurice Beebe's study of the artist-as-hero since the seventeenth century, Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts.[8] My artist is not a Byron or a Chatterton, nor even a Hemingway: he is a selfconscious, self-critical maker, and he creates his own portrait only through showing the difficult and fascinating nature of what he does in art, which again is just a concentrated paradigm of all human choice and control. My title therefore points to the art-work which is become in effect a portrait of itself and of its creator, and which often manages to include the problematics of publication and eventual readership in the picture.

A wider ambiguity is involved in my characterisation of artistic selfconsciousness as 'critical'. The adjective has three distinct meanings which are appropriate to this study. First, I think that the current selfconsciousness of the artist is significantly linked to the

massive explosion, through higher education, of the twentieth-century literary-critical industry, a point to which I shall return in detail later in this chapter. Suffice it to say here that a very large number of writers have been trained in academic literary-critical modes of thought, that many writers either write reviews for literary journals or are actually employed by colleges and universities as teachers of literature, or even creative writing fellows: most important, that all writers are at any rate aware of the literary-critical piranha-shoal waiting to feast upon their works. The net result is that the artist is not only educated to a point where he is hyperaware - sometimes intimidatingly so - of the length and magnitude of the literary tradition to which he adds his atoms,[9] he also knows he must himself be a critic of his work, for he is answerable to all the other critics who surround him,fierce professionals at that. Secondly, the phrase 'critical selfconsciousness' bears an implied burden of uncomfortable sensitivity and self-doubt deriving from the lay meaning of 'to criticise', i.e. 'to pass (esp. unfavourable) judgement' (OED). This anxious mood is frequently appropriate to the twentieth-century story-teller, unsure about the future of his art form and suspicious of all stories in this century of obscure and unhappy endings. In this as we shall see such artists as Barth or Beckett differ very much from their more confidently cheerful selfconscious predecessors in the eighteenth century. Thirdly, the writer's current selfconsciousness may aptly be said to be 'critical' insofar as it is often fraught with crisis, heavy with a sense that this is a crucial period in the history of the book and of prose-fiction in particular. All three meanings will be discussed at greater length presently when I pass on to some aspects of that history.

There are further points to be elaborated however about the phraseology of my title. I talk about 'contemporary fiction' rather than 'the contemporary novel', and I go on to describe critical selfconsciousness as an attribute of 'twentieth-century writing', something wider still. In choosing these terms I seek to emulate most selfconscious writers and avoid the more obvious perils of what Scholes and Kellogg call our prevalent 'hopelessly novel-centred' view of narrative literature.[10] This is important for many reasons. Although this study is explicitly concerned with the twentieth century, I shall insist that the twentieth-century appearance of the author in his work is in fact a reappearance, something which dates back to the first novels but which also goes back beyond that to earlier narrative forms and indeed can be traced to the fundamentals of the narrative act in everyday life, where the voice and physical presence of the storyteller add point to comic anecdote and tragic recital alike. The tendency of modern artists to look critically at the form they use under the far-ranging educational spotlight of our culture has yielded in many cases a radical sense of historical and geographical perspective. They have realised that narrative goes back before Defoe, further afield than the empire of Anglo-Saxon culture and beyond the silent and linear confines of the printed page. While literary critics, in short, have been responding to the air of crisis which currently prevades the novel with eschatological accounts of its exhaustion and even death, artists have been responding more positively by making dynamic changes in the nature of the object under threat, changing, indeed, its very name. Once a declaration of freedom and novelty, 'The Novel' has come to look like a formal category, and a restrictive one. The demise of the novel in its nineteenth-century sense may

more positively mean the revival of narrative.

Borges calls his work 'Fictions'[11] because it is just that: he sees no reason why he should write a conventionally well-covered novel - '"Why take five hundred pages to develop an idea whose oral demonstration fits into a few minutes?"', he has asked.[12] Writers like Richard Brautigan and Donald Barthelme in America, Giles Gordon, Angela Carter and Ian McEwan in England are also showing great interest in shorter, free-er prose forms: Beckett has taken this process to extremes with his infinitely pared-down 'residua'.[13] Philip Stevick talks about this in his contribution to Malcolm Bradbury's anthology, The Novel Today (1977), where he draws attention to a '...new...tendency to be able to take short forms as seriously as one takes the novel, ...and a tendency to be able to speak interchangeably about long and short forms as exhibits in a total range of fictional possibilities rather than stylised, circumscribed, discrete genres'.[14] (In point of fact the tendency is not entirely 'new', since Walter Benjamin wrote brilliantly in 1936 about the importance of the story, and the merits of 'chaste compactness' rather than the time-bound 'psychological analysis' of the novel, in his essay 'The Storyteller'.[15]) Nor is it only the length of novels which has come under attack. Frank Kermode points out in his W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture, published as Novel and Narrative (Glasgow, 1972), how novel-centred ideas like narrative consistency, linearity and realism have been challenged by such writers as Michel Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet, and suggests that we are returning to a more free-ranging pre-novelistic convention of narrative possibility.

My three main authors are all very aware of the need to improvise

creatively within and without the novel form. They break down any monolithic sense of what prose narrative should be by their willingness to learn from other genres, or simply to use them. They are technically selfconscious and experimental because they are conscious of a need to keep prose-writing alive. Woolf in a pioneering essay of 1927, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art', predicted that the novel of the future would come closer to poetry and to drama,[16] and she herself experimented boldly in that direction in Between the Acts (1941), with its passages of metrical prose-poetry and excerpts of drama. Much earlier, in Orlando: A Biography (1928) she had produced a marvellous hybrid of novel, biography, poetry and history. Nabokov has written plays, screenplays, short stories and poems as well as novels, and he embodies poetry into the actual texture of his novels (The Gift (1937), Lolita (1955) and most importantly Pale Fire (1962)).[17] Alfred Appel has shown how Nabokov uses cinematic technique in his fiction.[18] Most innovatory of the three in this respect, Beckett wrote only one novel whose form might remotely be called conventional (Murphy, 1938), and the rest show the novel in various stages of intensely creative dismemberment. Since the strange prose poetry of How It Is (1961) and The Lost Ones (1970) he has written only tiny fragments of prose, some of which have lent themselves naturally to broadcasting, and has devoted his energies almost exclusively to the theatre which began to engross him in the 1950s.

Theatre was, among other things, Beckett's answer to insoluble problems in getting his novels published and read. It is partly these problems which have forced other prose-writers also to look for alternatives to traditional novel form, with more appeal for the

twentieth-century market. The crisis in the economics of novel-publishing has become more acute as the century has progressed, as e.g. Bernard Bergonzi,[19] Malcolm Bradbury,[20] David Lodge,[21] and most recently and exhaustively J.A. Sutherland[22] have explained. Nabokov did not only turn to the cinema as a source of inspiration for narrative technique, he turned to it for hard cash with the filming of Lolita and later Laughter in the Dark (1932) and Despair (1936).[23] Muriel Spark, one of the wittiest and most polished selfconscious writers, writes lean, pared, dramatic works like The Driver's Seat (1970), Not to Disturb (1971), and The Abbess of Crewe (1974), completely stripped of any traditional literary padding, which are clearly extremely well-adapted in initial conception to the film treatment which they have indeed subsequently received - thus enormously increasing the audience for the author's work and also ensuring a substantial income from the film rights.[24] Kurt Vonnegut has responded to the challenge of finding an audience rather differently, by moving his intensely serious social parables into the territory of science fiction and most recently something between comic strip and graffiti, using a collage technique of cartoon drawings, scraps of autobiographical and historical fact, comic verse and a wildly centrifugal narrative thrust to break up any orderly or linear sense of the novel form (notably in Breakfast of Champions and Slapstick; or, Lonesome No More! (1976)). The very page is broken up into a string of short, readable sections marked off in Breakfast of Champions by arrows, in Slapstick by a printer's ornamental device, just long enough for the attention span of a readership used to pop journalism and the commercial breaks on television. Shock tactics of a kind likely to make Henry James turn somersaults in his grave - violence, cruelty, grotesquery, obscenity (in the conventional judgement) and sheer splendid lunatic farce - serve the same practical

purpose of keeping the reader awake as well as quite simply reflecting the facts of the twentieth century, 'Man's rude slapstick, yes, and God's'.[25] The technique seems to have worked for Vonnegut in terms of sales, and outraged purists may like to recall that there are certain affinities with the short chapters and occasional typographical skittishness of Tristram Shandy - written when the novel was first novel, and in no way symbolised, as it may now, traditional expectation or constraint. The selfconscious author's attempt to escape the silent straitjacket of the page is caught at its most extreme and frenetic in John Barth's explanatory 'Author's Note' to Lost in the Funhouse:

> ...while some of these pieces were composed expressly for print, others were not... 'Glossolalia' will make no sense unless heard in live or recorded voices, male and female, or read as if so heard; 'Echo' is intended for monophonic authorial recording, either disc or tape; 'Autobiography', for monophonic tape and visible but silent author... 'Title' makes somewhat separate but equally valid senses in several media: print, monophonic recorded authorial voice, stereophonic ditto in dialogue with itself, live authorial voice, live ditto in dialogue with monophonic ditto aforementioned, and live ditto interlocutory with stereophonic et cetera, my own preference; it's been 'done' in all six. (p.x)

Lacking Vonnegut's deflatory sense of humour, this reads like unintentional self-parody, and alerts us to a certain worrying streak of technical pedantry which sometimes encumbers contemporary experiment. However, in pointing away from a passive approach to the written page and towards performance it illustrates a very real trend in selfconscious writing and one which I shall later discuss in relation to the performance element in much earlier oral narrative. Barth's strenuous ingenuity demonstrates once again how inadequate is the novel category as generally understood to contain the energetic experimentation of my critically selfconscious writers. Nevertheless, we shall look first

within the history of the novel form for an understanding of their partial or total apostasy.

Before doing so, one final disclaimer about categories. In the first paragraph of this chapter I said that 'literature is polymorphous and rightly contemptuous of categories, which it will circumvent and evade whenever it can!'. It might equally be said that the self-consciousness of the twentieth-century artist is so polymorphous as to make him contemptuous of such categories as literature. It was with deep irony that the founders of Surrealism in France called their early journal Littérature (1919 - 1924):[26] their intention was precisely to question the adequacy of the conventional receptacles for creativity, 'art', 'literature', 'music'. No single decorative drawer could possibly contain the liberated energies of the post-Freudian self disillusioned with a postwar world. Nothing less than total psychic revolution would do, for the Surrealists were responding to a phenomenon which had vastly more significance than a piece of sectarian aesthetics. In the same way, selfconsciousness is a response to this century's history, with deep roots in social, political and economic changes and interesting analogues in philosophy, as we shall see. Intellectually we are a selfconscious century, fascinated by our overwhelming new acquisitions of knowledge about man's psychology, his cultural and social adaptation, the growth and decline of his body and brain. Individually we are selfconscious, uncomfortably aware of our fragmented selves, often socially mobile to the point of total rootlessness, lacking religious, national, class and even family identities or commitments. It is therefore inevitable that there should be not just selfconscious novelists but also selfconscious poets (Philip Larkin,

John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell) and selfconscious dramatists (Bertholt Brecht, Luigi Pirandello, just to name two pillars of the twentieth-century theatre): not only selfconscious literature but also selfconscious cinema (most of Luis Bunuel or Federico Fellini, Jacques Rivette's Céline and Julie Go Boating, Alain Resnais' Providence) and the selfconscious visual experiments of Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, Andy Warhol, Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud. However, though the implications of selfconsciousness may be infinitely wide, the dimensions of one book, my own, are necessarily limited. My last chapter will discuss the important sense in which we of the twentieth-century are all fiction-makers, and newly selfconscious about it, and I hope that the reader will bear in mind the possible relevance of my specifically literary-critical chapters to less specialised areas of contemporary consciousness: nevertheless, this work will abide by the categories it distrusts and concentrate on selfconscious literature and especially selfconscious prose fiction. It seems to me that there are many factors in the history of the novel that make prose fiction an especially rich source of selfconscious material.

If we adopt a school-room tripartite division of literature into plays, poems, and novels, the novel qualifies for selfconsciousness first of all by being the latest-born of the three major forms. Despite current critical assertions that the novel is jaded, dated and past its best, the undeniable fact is that it is a relative newcomer to the formal field of art. Newcomers are always called upon to account for themselves, and this process may go on for a long time (so late as the early part of this century such eminent practitioners are Henry James and Virginia Woolf were still having to argue the right of fiction to serious critical concern, as we shall see.) The novel is generally

agreed to have risen in the seventeenth century from the ashes of romance. The acceptance of a practice into official culture is not of course the same as its beginning in an absolute sense: realistic prose narrative something like that of the early novel must have been a characterising feature of human intercourse, gossip and confessional, letters and diaries, since civilised life began. However, though it is important to my view of the selfconscious narrator that prose tale had always existed wherever men talked and listened, such narratives could not become a culturally significant entity, 'the novel', until they were given the status of a commodity, and a popular one, by a body of writers and readers.

In the late middle ages vernacular prose, which had previously been for the most part taken for granted as serviceable, a universal possession, the language of everybody's private speech (and of public rhetoric about factual issues) started to challenge, as a medium for formal literary narrative, poetry, the traditional and magical medium in which privileged singers had encoded their tales.[27] In the sixteenth century prose was the medium for a range of major work as diverse as Lyly's Euphues (1578), and Nashe's The Unfortunate Traveller (1594).[28] The seventeenth century saw prose beginning to mark out what was to be one of its most important territories, journalism, and the turn of the century witnessed the emergence of polemical writers like Swift, Addison and Steele. Thus by the eighteenth century, when novels started being written in quantity, the literary respectability of prose had become an important cultural fact. These new narratives frequently used a live and colloquial prose to negotiate a recognisable world. Skilled artists like Sterne and Fielding were in effect moving art nearer to

the everyday logical narrative processes of the layman than it had ever been before. The rise of prose had various implications for selfconsciousness. In a verse art-work every constituent part is already marked out as special by its metre and rhyme and diction, something demanding more marked attention and respect than casual speech. Plays were not only written mostly in verse, they also had the further distinguishing marks of their dramatic unities. Prose art-works on the other hand must make some sort of declaration of intent to get the same respect, prodding the reader to appreciate the artistic technique or moral argument. More, prose art-works from The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749) to Ulysses (Paris, 1922) have often tried to achieve an emblazoned unity as a whole which will compensate for the apparently diffuse and discursive nature of their parts.

Thus Fielding not only explains and justifies his narrative procedures as he goes, in the first chapter of each book of Tom Jones: he also sets aside one such chapter to justify his justificatory chapters, almost a twentieth-century regressus in infinitum. In Chapter 1 of Book V, he states that he has decided these 'initial essays' are 'essentially necessary to this kind of writing (i.e. the novel), of which we have set ourselves at the head'.[29] He pre-empts critical challenges to this dictum by inquiring if the critics 'have ever demanded the reasons for that nice unity of time or place which is now established to be so essential to dramatick poetry?' He also asks if they have ever questioned the classical convention that plays shall have five acts, or the decorums which exclude 'low' humour from serious drama. Thus he asserts that his own framework of regularly recurring exposition shares an equal footing with the framing and

ordering conventions of drama. In parrying critical attacks upon his methodological chapters he simply says that inquiry into the reasons for his convention is folly, for as with all artistic rules 'there are sound and good reasons at bottom, though we are unfortunately not able to see so far '. In fact he has supplied an excellent rationale for his 'rule' without even noticing it: he has implicitly suggested that 'prosai-comi-epic writing', in other words prose narrative, must have some equivalent to the strict conventions which dignify other artistic forms. Since the narrative in all the subsequent chapters of each book will plunge headlong into life and violate all the decorums which regular rhymes and rythms or regularising unities of time and place might impose, an urbane, self-aware, prefatory statement of artistic intent is called for in each Chapter 1. In Chapter 1 of Book X we find Fielding in even more pugilistic mood with any critic who dares to deem some individual parts of his work irrelevant or diversionary simply because he is too obtuse to perceive the novel's overall design:

> ...we warn thee not too hastily to condemn any of the incidents in this our history, as impertinent and foreign to our main design, because thou dost not immediately conceive in what manner such incident may conduce to that design. The work may, indeed, be considered as a great creation of our own; and for a little reptile of a critic to presume to find fault with any of its parts, without knowing the manner in which the whole is connected...is a most presumptuous absurdity.(p.467)

The novel, in short, was forced by the uncertain pedigree and etiquette of prose fiction to declare its controlling hand at regular intervals, and ultimately to assert as in the foregoing passage that it was a designed aesthetic unity - a 'great creation' - not a mere sprawl of speech. Thus the novel's tendency to selfconsciousness is to some extent endemic in prose fiction's graduation towards the status of

high narrative art, a graduation not finally granted full academic honours until our own century.[30]

The beginnings of the novel have been described elsewhere in far more depth and complexity than I can manage here: what now interests me is the relationship between the rise of novelistic narrative and the beginnings of middle-class mercantile society, on which influential theorists like Georg Lukács, Arnold Kettle, and Ian Watt (in The Rise of the Novel (1957)) have remarked. The nascent 'individual' may be defined not only by his own positive and interested sense of himself but also by what he is losing, i.e. the secure communal identity which in fixed feudal societies protected men against too acute a consciousness of themselves: this process was intensified by the Reformation with its attack on the universal authority of the Catholic church. Lukács says in The Theory of the Novel (1920) that 'the inner form of the novel has been understood as the process of the problematic individual's journeying towards himself...towards clear self-recognition'.[31] This notion of 'journeying' is very important in a more literal sense than Lukács' persistently abstract formulations suggest. Social mobility is vital for the individual to gain any objective sense of his differentness, his characteristic world-view, for in a static society controlled by fixed social hierarchies and a comprehensive theology men can only relate to others who think like themselves. The guarantee of their 'rightness' - and also their unselfconsciousness - is unanimity, and the fact that the objective structure of the social world illustrates the accepted social values. The increasing degree of mobility which the emergent middle classes attained in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries permitted more

relativised and sceptical views of the order of things, and the individual had to take his own empirical observations as his safest source of authority about the world, with his continuing personal identity in the face of changing status as its only real pledge.

Karl Mannheim puts it thus in Ideology and Utopia :

> Epistemology was the first significant product of the breakdown of the unitary world-view with which the modern era was ushered in...thinkers who were penetrating to the very foundations of thought were discovering not only numerous world-views but also numerous ontological orders. Epistemology sought to eliminate this uncertainty by taking its point of departure...from an analysis of the knowing subject...attempting thereby to find an anchorage for objective existence.[32]

Descartes put a related point much more succinctly in the sixteenth century; only the reticence of the Latin language in his famous formulation, cogito ergo sum, mutes its most distinctive note, the double presence of the subject, 'I think therefore I am' [my itals.] Postfeudal philosophers thought about themselves thinking. Philosophers did not beget novelists, nor vice versa, but both classes of men were responding to new uncertainties and new freedoms as they emerged from the shelter of communal deference to received texts and absolute hierarchies - and found the air bright and cold in the extreme. Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel links the early novel's rejection of universals and espousal of concrete experience to the materialism and empiricism of Hobbes and the eighteenth-century tradition of British empiricist philosophers who followed him, notably Locke and Hume.[33]

To simplify a complex case, the philosophers attacking the omniscience of scholastic dogma with robust individual commonsense and the novelists deflating the outdated aristocratic conventions of romance with an appeal to the everyday reality of contemporary society were both in their own ways expressing a revolutionary abhorrence 'Of the darkness from vain

philosophy and fabulous traditions', to quote the title of the forty-sixth chapter of Hobbes' Leviathan (1651). Yet the womb-like and carefully-layered darkness had protected them against too much knowledge or awareness of themselves.

Lukács contrasts the restless society which produced the novel with the happy and integrated ages of epic, whose values are secure and given from above, 'ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars...the happy ages have no philosophy' (op. cit., p.29). They have no need of the arduous definitions of philosophy, he suggests, because there is no separation between the self and the world. But in the postfeudal world this assured sense of men's inherited place in the order of things disappears, and they have to seek their ontological security through intellectual voyages. He quotes Novalis' powerful maxim:'"Philosophy is really homesickness: it is the urge to be at home everywhere."' (p.26) Such an urge is presumably the consequence of not feeling at home where we actually stand. The times when we are literally and metaphorically at home are the times when we are least likely to feel selfconscious, and the converse truth applies. We can relate this philosophical 'urge to be at home' to Lukács' formulation later in the same book that the novel expresses a 'transcendental homelessness' very like that of Romanticism (p.41). If the novelist is really looking (and rather more literally than Lukács suggests) for his place in an uncertain and expanding world, it is significant that the novel, as the major literary form to arise after the invention of printing, was particularly well-adapted from a technological point of view to negotiate that world, to find a temporary home and an audience in varied strata of society.

The sense of homelessness at the novel's beginnings conveys a certain inner logic to its situation in the fragmented and cosmopolitan twentieth century, and especially to the curiously 'displaced' character of the modern writer noted by Malcolm Bradbury in his 1971 introduction to the second English translation of Robert Escarpit's Sociology of Literature.[34] My three main writers are all in their different ways apt illustrations of Lukács' thesis of the novel's original 'transcendental homelessness'. Nabokov was exiled from native land, native language and his family's wealth and prestige by the Russian Revolution: Beckett exiled himself through deliberate cultural choice from the Irish literary tradition which might have been his home, and chose to write mostly in a language not his own: even Woolf, relatively secure in her specialised literary world, was a youthful defector to Bohemia from the genteel conventions of her birth and background, a rebel against the Victorian family, and even more important a woman in a society of male intellectuals. I wish to argue that the twentieth-century selfconscious novel is a casebook continuation and exaggeration of the selfconsciousness endemic in the beginnings of the novel, which sought to record a shifting society in an originally 'unofficial' medium, demotic prose. The essential point is that the displacement from a fixed and familiar context makes us more aware both of our external environment and of our newly shell-less selves: an examination of the relationship between the two things may be the basis equally of a theory of knowledge or a novel. The essential paradigm is a working out of the relationship between the unshelled self and the world newly discovered to be material, puzzling and separate.

In studying contemporaneous reactions to a fragmenting world-order

in the novel and in philosophy, it is apparent that the artist often thinks more radically than the philosopher, because he is less fettered by a respectable trade or professional respect for functional truths. When a novelist like Sterne accepts responsibility for the picture of the world he paints, rather than calling on received literary authority or universal tablets of truth, he is an even more daring representative of the emergence of individualism than the philosopher who exalts individual judgement and cognitive powers but applies them to a pre-existent world not of his own making. Watt is however clearly right in seeing a connection between the rise of the novel and the pragmatic bias of the British empiricist philosophers.[35] To base one's world-view on personal observations is a radical act when the alternative is to accept a monolithic world-view whose subtleties derive from the explication of ancient text. But though Hobbes and later Locke could make fun of the wilder prejudices of their mediaeval fore-runners and even keep a rigorously critical eye on their own empirical investigations, they were not in the least sceptical about the goal of their endeavours, the discovery of truth about the world. There they showed a conservative dignity and respect. Philosophy was still not far from natural science: it wanted to know the nature of things, and Descartes' individual knowing subject still bore a strictly dependent relationship to the objective world he sought to know. The cogitating ego was no anarchist. In Locke's formulation ideas were the product of sensations directly derived from material reality (there the analogies to the procedures of certain unselfconscious popular novelists today, who derive their ideas for novels from soaking up sense impressions in exotic locales.) Locke set out to analyse the methods and limitations of the perceiving self in

his classic Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), but the self he discovered was largely a passive recording-machine for the manifest qualities of the physical world: 'Whence has [the mind] all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I must answer, in one word, from experience... the senses...from external objects convey into the mind what produces there those perceptions.'[36]

Artists on the other hand have always been perfectly aware that the materials in their minds were largely the result of invention. Mimesis was never so deferential that it excluded the pleasures of design. Defoe and Richardson knew perfectly well that Robinson Crusoe and Pamela were the offspring of their own brains: they merely capitalised upon the layman's newly-acquired respect for individual experience when they presented their fabrications as authentic autobiography, authentic correspondence. And a century earlier Cervantes' duplicitous assertions of the authenticity of his 'discovered' manuscript had gone even further, overtly exploiting the artist's perennial awareness of the tension between truth and fiction for ironic effect. It was men's complacent expectations of truthfulness and the possibility of general truths that shattered under the ironic lance. The method of Cervantes in The Adventures of Don Quixote (1604 - 1615) may indeed be read as a metaphor for the proceedings of those later philosophers who I think have even more in common with the central impulse of the selfconscious novel than the British empiricists, the German Idealist philosophers of the nineteenth century.

After the first eight chapters of Don Quixote, Cervantes or his persona interrupts a stirring duel to say that 'the author of this

history left the battle in suspense at this critical point, with the excuse that he could find no more records of Don Quixote's exploits...'[37] He later 'finds', by deliberately improbable coincidence, a continuation of the story from precisely that point by an Arab historian, Cid Hamete Benengeli, being sold for scrap paper in Toledo. Although he adds such substantiating details as his payment of fifty pounds of raisins and three bushels of wheat for the sheets to be translated, he clearly means the astute reader to find him out in this fictional sleight of hand:[38] he even allows the otherwise deluded Don Quixote to be quite aware he is a character in a novel. What Cervantes really does is playfully assert his right to find not just a manuscript but whatever his subjective will wishes to find in the objective configuration of the world, just as Don Quixote has the right to invent the peerless Dulcinea, and give her considerable literary substance, because his chivalric code demands that the objective order of things provide him with a lady. Cervantes is entirely knowing about his subversive procedures: even as he is solemnly praising the 'true story' of the 'sage historian' Cid Hamete Benengeli and his fidelity to the extra-ordinary saga of Don Quixote, he is delightedly aware that he himself invented not only Don Quixote but also Cid Hamete Benengeli.[39] Small wonder that Borges often evokes Cervantes in his own games with reality, and that Robert Alter starts his study of the selfconscious novel with a chapter on Don Quixote.[40] It is evident that in a Cervantes novel the subjectivity of the individual disoriented by a dissolving cosmos was free to perform much more dramatically in renovating an unsatisfactory world-picture than the painstakingly cogitating observer of Descartes' Meditations (1641) or the 'common man' of Locke or Hume in the next century.

Turning to the rise of the English novel in that same century, Henry Fielding is far more of a classicist, moralist and gentleman than Cervantes but he has a not unrelated sense of his responsibilities to his own generating imagination and his status as a world-builder, and as we have seen does not hesitate to remind the reader that he will invent and present his narrative matter as he likes: 'I am, in reality, the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein.' (Tom Jones, p.89) However he is a true British empiricist insofar as in 'Chapter the Last' of his novel he finally subordinates his manuscript to a posited 'real world' outside it, allowing his characters to continue in a perpetual present tense ('...there are not to be found a worthier man and woman ... neither can any be imagined more happy') outside the completed time sequence of the novel. The figures of novelist and reader thus in the end lose the robust vitality of their contract and fade to an inferior order of reality as for the last time they 'return to take their leave of Mr. Jones and Sophia.'[41] Subject retreats before object, fiction before 'fact'.

The gap between the British empiricist inheritance of Fielding and the Spanish metaphysical acrobatics of Cervantes is best illustrated by the respective conclusions to their works: Don Quixote ends with the Cervantic authorial persona firmly killing off Don Quixote, and making sure there is a certificate of death '...in order to deprive any author other than Cid Hamete Benengeli of all excuse for falsely resuscitating him and writing interminable histories of his deeds ' (p.939). Thus, fact is no sooner established as such (by the curate's death certificate, a parody of the normal social machinery for authenticating our actions

and the end of them) than it is teasingly translated back to the plane of fiction by a reminder that Don Quixote is not so much a mortal corpse as a famous fictional character, and an immortal temptation to plagiarists. The certificate is needed because Cervantes suspects that other writers, equally sceptical about appearances and equally disrespectful of the authority of past texts, will be encouraged to theft by his own anarchic premise that Don Quixote is a concocted character in a counterfeit history: there is a danger they will continue the imposture in theirs. Cervantes' assumption is that, contrary to what was asserted in the rigidly moralised, unreflexive, unified world of chivalric romance which Don Quixote shatters through satire, the individual makes his own choices and chances and finally his own world. Fielding on the other hand may be sceptical enough to know that some of his chapters contain only 'five Pages of Paper', but nevertheless he defers extensively to a more common sense of shared reality (Tom Jones, p.151).

Laurence Sterne is Cervantes' closest English relative, writing one and a half centuries later. The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy (1759 - 1767) is dizzily rich in examples of the selfconscious fiction-maker revelling in the liberty of a new form. I shall quote just one passage which shows a vivid awareness of the possibilities for (in this case comic) schizophrenia in the postfeudal human intellect which becomes too conscious of its own infinite freedom to imagine and invent, and simultaneously incapable of granting too much credence to any of its inventions:

> - Now this is the most puzzled skein of all - for in the last chapter...I have been getting forwards in two different journeys together, and with the same dash of the same pen -

for I have got entirely out of Auxerre in this chapter which I am writing now, and I am got half way out of Auxerre in that which I shall write hereafter...I have brought myself into such a situation, as no traveller ever stood in before me; for I am this moment walking across the market-place of Auxerre with my father and my uncle Toby, in our way back to dinner - and I am this moment also entering Lyon with my post-chaise broke into a thousand pieces - and I am moreover at this moment in a handsome pavillion built by Pringello, upon the banks of the Garonne, which Mons. Slignac lent me, and where I now sit rhapsodizing these affairs.
- Let me collect myself, and pursue my journey.

Volume VII Chapter 28, 1967 edition,
edited by Graham Petrie, p.492

At a primary level the comedy depends on a purely technical predicament, the paradoxical ability of the novelist to imagine himself in two places at once, while he is actually working in a third. In another sense the novelist only exemplifies in a more idiosyncratic, stylish and speculative fashion the puzzlement his contemporaries felt before such encroachments on the real world as George Berkeley's in The Principles of Human Knowledge (1710):-

> ...it is granted...(and what happens in dreams, frenzies and the like, puts it beyond dispute) that it is possible we might be affected by all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without [= outside the mind] resembling them.[42]

The 'puzzlement' of Tristram Shandy's 'skein' derives from the fact that a naive thinker might believe that the novelist really is in the mutually exclusive situations he is describing. But he and his more sophisticated readers are enjoying the fact that 'no bodies existed without [his fictional structures], resembling them', i.e. that fictions can exist independently of external models of logic. Berkeley did in fact ultimately preserve an allegiance to the real world by asserting that things did not disappear when we ceased to think of them (as might seem to follow from his credo that we are really only sure of the

existence of ideas within our own minds) by a rather traditional recourse to God as a kind of celestial Caretaker, who looked after the world of objects whenever something slipped the mind of man -

> 'There is therefore some other Mind wherein sensible things exist, during the intervals between the times of my perceiving them ... an omnipresent, eternal Mind.'
>
> (Phylonous to Hylas, The Dialogues of Hylas and Phylonous, 1713.)[43]

It is on an analogous principle of divine watchfulness that Sterne works when he moves restlessly from one part of the world, one point in narrative time, to another: but the omnipresent, eternal mind which preserves Tristram-in-Auxerre and Tristram-in-Lyons while Tristram-the-Third briefly returns to his study, is not God's but the author's. In that idiosyncratically framed, selective and distorting mirror Sterne can see whatever he wants to, and then startle the somnolent reader by translating his inventions into the mode of factual description in the world of his book. Thus Sterne shows himself just as radically energetic as Cervantes in ricocheting about his own self-generated and selfconscious cosmos.

As we have seen, philosophers found it harder than novelists to shuck off and replace the lost cosmology of a certain age, which is why the full implications of the fictionalising procedures of the first defiantly selfconscious novelists did not find a parallel in serious philosophy until the nineteenth century. Immanuel Kant inspired and liberated the speculations of the later German Idealists when at the end of the eighteenth century he chalked on top of Locke's innocently receptive tabula rasa of the human mind his own notion of a priori logic, the predetermined forms of human understanding. He did not yet

go so far as Cervantes by saying that men found in a malleable world whatever they wanted to find, but he did point out that they could only discover those things about a concrete world which the a priori constructs of their minds allowed. The pithier and more popular formulations of Kant's achievement make it sound as though he was the founder of absolute scepticism (thus the Britannica Macropaedia says, admittedly with some elegance, that 'Kant had found reason to be the form that mind imposed upon the world', which sounds more like a theorem from twentieth-century structuralism), but it is important that Kant still believed unquestioningly in the possibility of discovering objective truth, never thought that the a priori formal structures of human intellectuality severed connections with 'things-in-themselves', and never suggested that 'things-in-themselves' might be chaos without the mediation of orderly perception.[44] Hegel like Kant gave Idealist philosophy an essentially objective orientation, and his conception of selbstbewusstsein (selfconsciousness), as expounded in the Philosophy of Mind (1830), gives it the status of the means to true and active knowledge of the world, in his dialectical analysis of consciousness:

> The grades of this elevation of truth to certainty are three in number: first (a) consciousness in general, with an object set against it; (b) self-consciousness, for which ego is the object; (c) unity of consciousness and selfconsciousness, where the mind sees itself embodied in the object...[45]

However, Kant was followed not only by Hegel but also by the 'Absolute Idealism' of Fichte and Schelling, who pursued the subjective element in Kantian thought, dispensed with the notion of things-in-themselves and were more interested in seeing the object embodied in the mind than vice versa. They therefore ended in what Henry D. Aiken calls 'extreme subjectivism',[46] a state of affairs contemporaneously mirrored in the writing of the Romantic poets (and Schelling of course was philosopher

and poet both.) Selfconsciousness as a postulate of modern fiction seems intimately related at one level to the procedures of Fichte, who demolished the established system whereby the subjective human will-to-know had to pass through the supposedly objective paths of the will-to-know-the-truth.

Fichte in effect said that the perceiving subject can and will find Cid Hamete Benengeli's manuscript, or whatever else he wishes to find, at Toledo, for Mind is King. He asserts a fiction-generating Ego as a conditioning first premise to all men's claims of 'objective' knowledge, and does not assume, as even Kant had, that percepts in the observing mind were in any sense causally related to perceptible objects in the real world. Fichte's The Science of Knowledge (1794) sought for a 'FIRST AND ABSOLUTELY UNCONDITIONED PRINCIPLE', and found it in the absolute circularity of the Ego: '...Ego = Ego, or I am I...' Thus the 'first principle' assumes no subordination of the 'science of knowledge' to any real and investigable objective world, for the latter could only be a postulate of the Ego, which seems in Fichte's account to have quite enough to do postulating itself: 'the ground of explanation of all facts of empirical consciousness is this; before all positing, the Ego must be posited through itself.'[47] Henry D. Aiken comments that

> As [Fichte] understands it 'reality' is not coextensive with what, in any ordinary sense, would be said to exist, but rather with what the will takes to be necessary to the realisation of its own ends. In his philosophy the distinction between what ought to be and what is real finally breaks down altogether...[48]

There are clear analogies to the practice of contemporary selfconscious fiction-makers who present their world unapologetically as an invention, and think it by no means inferior on that account to novelistic accounts which seek to be faithful to the objective 'facts' of the material world.

Once it is accepted that there is no Lockean tabula rasa which can receive 'the truth' innocently, or represent it by simple imitation, men are free to try and arrive at different kinds of truth by selection, exaggeration, addition, invention, transposition, all the techniques by which writers like Cervantes or Sterne made an organised fictional world function as a pointed and powerful commentary on the less focussed reality of their readers. In effect Fichte shifted the very concept of truth, stripping it of the moral weight that it derived from the assumption of solid roots in the substance of the world.

Aiken says that

> ...Fichte...wholly rejects the old, uncritical 'correspondence theory' or truth. What he replaces it with verges on what later idealists call a 'coherence theory', according to which the truth of any assertion is to be tested by its compatibility with the totality of other assertions which we are obliged to make.[49]

Once again, the relevance of this to the art-work which rejects the mimetic imperative in favour of the imperative of its own form is clear. The general notion that a work of art should be judged 'in its own terms' - something very like a 'coherence theory' - is an integral part of early twentieth-century aesthetics. It was formulated polemically by the New Critics but it derives from the organicist theory of art which had its birth in the Romantic era, and comes from the same social and historical matrix as Fichte's sceptical theory of truth. If the mind is not a mirror which can directly reflect the world, it can still reflect the searching self and focus an internally coherent world-view.

Friedrich Nietzsche with his artist's style and his artist's capacity for moral anarchy took the premise of Idealist philosophy a vital step further when he urged the subjective intellect to reject all

conventional moral constraints, as well as conventional fidelity to any 'facts' which were inconvenient or merely dull. For Nietzsche, man's capacity to invent is his great source of strength, as this well-known passage from Beyond Good and Evil (1886) makes clear:

> The falseness of an opinion is not for us any objection to it ... The question is, how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving, species-preserving...and we are fundamentally inclined to maintain that the falsest opinions...are the most indispensable to us; that without recognition of logical fictions, without a comparison of reality with the purely imagined world of the absolute and immutable ...man could not live...[50]

The Nietzschean determination to take subjectivism 'beyond good and evil' raises a familiar spectre, that of the traditional 'bad end' to which such progressive dissolutions of order as we have been following supposedly lead. The problematic part of Nietzsche's formulation lies in its very first statement, that 'falseness' is a thing of no consequence. This raises one of the central critical issues where fiction-makers and especially self-declaring fiction-makers will come under essentially moral attack from the defenders of realism. The case of subjective artist declaring his freedom to invent, subjective philosopher declaring his freedom to believe and subjective ruler declaring his freedom to enforce belief are different, but all must run the gauntlet of similar accusations.

Men in any kind of society have a basic kind of vested interest in being 'told the truth', in the sense that we must often base our every-day actions on practical information from our fellows: our prejudices therefore incline us to suspicion of fictions of every kind, a suspicion evidenced in the original pejorative sense of fiction (to mean 'feigning')[51] and concentrated in our peculiarly British fondness for empirical and

deductive, rather than synthesizing and inductive, modes of thought. Whatever subtle formulations the post-Enlightenment philosophers and novelists were evolving about the relativism of truth and its dependence upon the problematic knowing subject, rather than a monolithically organised objective structure of 'things-in-themselves', the layman continued and continues to wish to 'believe his own eyes', to be told a single and certain truth, to do as Dr. Johnson did and kick the stone with a commonsense boot in refutation of Berkeleyan assertions that reality is only as real as we think it to be.[52] Traces of this view adhere to Bertrand Russell's response to Fichte and Nietzsche. He is a professional philosopher but he is also very British and deeply committed in a political and moral sense to historical actuality. His censures of the subjectivism of Idealist philosophy stem from an attitude which still characterises liberal criticism of 'ideologists' and realist literary criticism of selfconscious artists.

Much of the interest of Russell's monumental History of Western Philosophy derives from the fact that it was first published in 1946, at the end of a war where Nazi myths of the racially superior Superman (and the militarist fictions of both sides) had created hideous factual disaster and the reduction of millions of men to the subhuman. Both Fichte and Nietzsche were made use of by Nazi ideologists to justify nationalistic self-assertion: they were clearly useful philosophical mentors for fascist policy-makers, with their wilful abandonment of any commonly-accepted criterion of truth or any communal 'humane' morality. It is not surprising then that Russell's History indicts Fichte with 'solipsism' and 'a kind of insanity' (pp. 689 - 690), since the practical Teutonic corollaries of such thinking

seemed to Russell's liberal English rationality insane. A theory clearly cannot be judged entirely by its corollaries, but in any case this is where philosophers and literary fiction-makers part company. It is not only that literature has been at pains for much of this violent and confused century to isolate itself from public responsibilities to history and the state, to bite the hand that feeds it, as Leslie Fiedler puts it,[53] to retreat from the public perversions of language and emotion involved in George Steiner's 'Season in Hell '.[54] Artists do indeed make public denials of any commitment to the world outside the art-work, first to keep their own patterns of language and emotion safe from contamination, secondly to avoid the reductive interpretations of heavy-footed critics,and selfconscious writers like Beckett and Nabokov have been the first to do so. Nabokov has said that he can only conceive of 'reality' in inverted commas,[55] and his critical writing often fiercely asserts the autonomy of art:

> I have never been interested in what is called the literature of social comment ...I am neither a didacticist nor an allegorizer. Politics and economics, atomic bombs ...the Future of Mankind, and so on, leave me supremely indifferent.[56]

Nevertheless, I would not defend self-declaring fiction-makers against accusations of moral irresponsibility or solipsism merely on the grounds that, unlike philosophers, they have no designs on the real world and therefore do noone any harm. It seems to me that assertions like Nabokov's are something of a smokescreen, a clever exploitation of New Critical principles to thwart the critic who tries to read the world through the window of the text. The fact is that selfconscious fictionists play their games for a serious purpose, and that purpose is the construction of new truths, despite the firework display on the surface, as Nabokov in another mood declares:

> ...the main favour I ask of the serious critic is sufficient perceptiveness to understand that whatever term or trope I

> use, my purpose is not to be facetiously flashy or grotesquely obscure but to express what I think and feel with the utmost truthfulness and perception.[57]

Again, he believes that

> one day a reappraiser will come and declare that, far from having been a frivolous firebird, I was a rigid moralist kicking sin, cuffing stupidity, ridiculing the vulgar and cruel...[58]

Or, as B.S. Johnson puts it, more simply, in the interesting introduction to Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs (1973), 'I am not interested in telling lies in my own novels ....I choose to write truth in the form of a novel.' (p.14) We are returned, in short, to what I said on page 3 of this chapter about the defictionalising intent of selfconscious fiction.

An assertion of the fictionality of the world, or rather of the way in which our experience of it is ordered and expressed through fictions, may lead in two directions: in Nietzsche we saw the culminating point of the subjectivist strand in Idealist philosophy, and he had decided that since all is fictional, truth or falsehood matter not at all and we must assert whatever makes us strong. On the other hand for selfconscious novelists, whose awareness of the fabricated nature of 'reality' is every bit as acute, the motivating factor in their own world-description remains a passionate concern for the truth - albeit on occasion a truth expressed metaphorically, through fantasy or parody. This is the impulse behind the constant exposure of the frame, in selfconscious fiction; it asserts not only the constructed and provisional nature of the novelist's own artistic framework but also the infinite series of frames and models which both reader and writer must use every day to make sense of experience. The aim of the self-

conscious novelist is to use the truest models, to deflate rhetoric and cant, to show how insidiously selective are the clichés of our culture by questioning, for example, the descriptions of human personality which underlie many of our 'commonsense' notions of morality. Thus Nabokov in the very book, Bend Sinister, (1947) whose 1963 introduction declared him to be 'supremely indifferent' to the 'Future of Mankind' (loc. cit.), created a world which is a farcical and ultimately terrifying parody of the egalitarian propaganda and totalitarian purposes of the modern state: Paduk the toad-like leader advocates the philosophy of 'Ekwilism', the 'Party of the Average Man', whereby men will be made equal not only economically but also through the eradication of every difference of personality and talent, 'the remoulding of human individuals in conformity with a well-balanced pattern ' (pp. 66-67). To Nabokov's dissident hero Krug however Paduk is not even human, merely the 'Toad' he resembles, and he remarks that the aged revolutionary who inspired Ekwilism, '...like most of his kind, relied entirely upon generalisations and was quite incapable of noting, say, the wallpaper in a chance room or talking intelligently to a child ' (p.69). Despite his introduction, and the elegant retreats he makes back to a purely literary plane whenever the portrayed reality of Krug's world becomes too horrible, Nabokov is clearly aware of the dangers of a supremely intelligent and self-aware character like Krug retreating into the fastnesses of self where 'The square root of I is I' (p.6), falsely secure in his belief that Ekwilism is too vulgar, banal and foolish to deserve taking seriously. Because Krug does not believe in the power of a myth he despises, he loses his son and his life. Nabokov does not make the same mistake, and in this book pays totalitarian myth the compliment of exposing at length its grossness and its cruelty: the

attack loses nothing of its force from the fact that he also recurrently exposes his own hand as artificer, thus holding the reader back from too easy an emotional response to the horror which lurks behind the elegant prose, and demanding a more active and critical reaction. Other selfconscious writers perform similar demolition work on different kinds of myth: Joseph Heller in his monumental Something Happened (1974) exposes office politics as an obsessional children's game, Beckett shows the emptiness of most of our ritual assertions of optimism when he puts them into the mouth of a desperate woman buried up to her neck in Happy Days (1961), Vonnegut in Breakfast of Champions dissolves the whole structure of conventional novelistic judgements of character when he insists that mood and personality are a matter of chemicals:

> I tend to think of human beings as huge, rubbery test tubes...with chemical reactions seething inside...When I get depressed, I take a little pill, and I cheer up again...So it is a big temptation for me, when I create a character for a novel, to say that he is what he is because of faulty wiring, or because of microscopic amounts of chemicals he ate or failed to eat on that particular day.[59]

Again, Virginia Woolf in all her work attacks the characteristic weight and certainty of judgement which she attributes to her male characters, creating dummies like Hugh Whitbread and Sir William Bradbury in Mrs Dalloway (1925) to mouth the platitudes which feminine intuition and perception unmask: and more recently selfconscious writers like Fay Weldon and Angela Carter have also tried to unmask society's stereotyping of the female.[60] Nathalie Sarraute undermines set notions of 'character' and linear accounts of human action just as thoroughly but infinitely more slowly than Vonnegut through her absorption in the subtext to conversation, the plural possibilities of emotional response, the constant and random bifurcations of the plots

we enact.[61] Muriel Spark in works like The Public Image (1968), Not to Disturb and The Abbess of Crewe dissects with cat-like precision the frantic manipulations we employ in order to present an image to the world which is 'natural', 'consistent' and 'life-like', in other words which corresponds to entirely false stereotypes of human personality and behaviour. Lastly, Anthony Burgess in the Enderby trilogy[62] directs a wickedly funny broadside at the notion of the poet as a creature of air through his creation of the impoverished poet Enderby, whose grotesque bachelor existence is centered around bizarrely improvised food and the gas, rather than air, which it causes. This seeps recurrently into the text whenever moments of high poetic dignity belonging to the accepted myth of literary life occur, such as the banquet where Enderby is to be honoured with a gold medal:

> Enderby smiled across back at some woman who had smiled at him. I have always admired your poetry but to see you in the flesh is a revelation. I bet it bloody well is. Perrrrrrp.

This is comic, but it is also a subversive assertion of the power of the real and the particular in the face of the pompous literary fancifications of Sir George's eulogising speech:

> 'A revelation...of the purest beauty. The magical power of poetry to transmute the dross of the everyday workaday world into the sheerest gold...' (Inside Mr. Enderby, pp. 58-59)

Selfconscious literature abounds in examples of this kind of deflationary technique, and many more will emerge in the course of my next three chapters. It is anti-literature insofar as it is anti- what is dead in literature, and anti-fiction insofar as it is opposed to fictions which veil and blur the sharp truth.

Selfconscious fictionists do not deny that models must be built, patterns made, the flux stayed for a moment, if man is to negotiate the world at all, indeed they assert that pattern-making is indispensable: but they do demand a perpetual and radical process of watchfulness, analysis, sensitivity to the particular at the expense of the bland generality, de-construction and re-construction of something which approximates more nearly to all the energy and detail of what we know. It is necessary to assert this essentially truthful and in a deep sense 'realistic' intention of selfconscious fiction in defiance of critics who support a more traditional kind of realism and respond to writing which deviates from the mimetic norm with a moral disapproval very like Russell's of Fichte. The disapproval tends to be levelled at an idea of formalism, decadence, frivolity rather than at individual authors. Thus Lionel Trilling, who at other times shows himself a most sensitive and perceptive critic of modernist works and was especially notable as an advocate of Lolita,[63] says in 'Manners, Morals and the Novel' (1947) that the true end of a novel must be 'moral realism', and fears that fiction will lose its way if it deviates from its traditional role as a panoramic chronicle of men in their literal social roles.[64] The novel should be 'a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world', and its medium should be 'a straighforward prose, rapid, masculine and committed to events '. It seems to him unarguable that 'anything that complicates our moral fervour in dealing with reality as we immediately see it and wish to drive headlong upon it must be regarded with some impatience'.[65] The very question which launched the speculations of empiricist and idealist philosophers alike, and which is now the dynamic behind the labours of selfconscious novelists, is begged in his remarks: a 'quest for reality'

must take place within the mind of man as well as in the social world. Moreover there are dangers in converting 'moral fervour' into 'headlong' action which may best be averted by a prose committed to the subtle contrarieties of truth rather than the rapidity of events. The reason why art should make a useful arena for the investigation of truth is precisely its temporally suspended quality, the fact that conclusions can be arrived at without events intruding, pushing us on, demanding provisional and temporary conclusions. Mere artists and philosophers, who commit their hours to examining premises, have infinitely greater chance of arriving at universal truth than men of action, committed to achieving particular and limited ends within limited periods of time. The selfconscious novelist investigates reality, rather than merely demonstrating an acquaintance with it. He works towards a truth about the world we share through a total metaphor for it, his own fictional world.

The relationship of selfconscious fiction to the discovery of truth is perhaps analogous to that suggested between utopia and social science by Barbara Goodwin (Social Science and Utopia: Nineteenth-Century Models of Social Harmony, 1978.) Utopias are essentially fictions, and the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were fertile ground for both. When a social or political theorist bases his analysis of the real world on a comparison with the deliberately 'unrealistic' utopian or dystopian models he constructs, he is merely inventing an imaginative standpoint from which to understand and criticise what is. Goodwin says that the utopian theorist's

> modus operandi is to promote social criticism and change through the device of an alternative construction of society... The hallmarks of utopian thought are creative,

> innovatory imagination, and aspiration which reaches beyond the familiar towards the potential and the ideal.(pp.7-8)

The utopians' usefulness to social science comes from 'their transcendence of the given reality ' (p.203). Selfconscious fictionists similarly work towards a fuller realism by moving away from the apparent object, transcending the immediate appearance of reality. F.R. Leavis ignores the author's need to maintain a critical distance and plural perspective when in The Common Pursuit (1965) he attacks E.M. Forster for violating realistic illusion. Leavis feels that Forster's 'personal distinction of style' and commenting authorial presence 'doesn't favour...the presentment of themes and experiences as things standing there in themselves '. The moralistic element in his disapproval is clear when he goes on to link the Forsterian self with 'the very inferior social-intellectual milieu in which it has developed'[66] - i.e. Bloomsbury, as we might rather say the home of modernism and selfconscious experiment in the verbal and visual arts. What self-conscious fiction asserts is that things do not stand there in themselves, they stand there as we choose to see them, and therefore it is essential that we make every effort to see clearly and be prepared to try the view from more than one perspective. Looked at this way, things do not stand, they move and change.

This is what is so ironic about Lukács' characterisation of traditional realism in The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (1957) as 'dynamic and developmental' and modernism as 'static and sensational'.[67] The two descriptions might much more suitably be reversed: a fiction-maker who shows his fiction and its world in the dynamic process of construction can hardly be accused of a 'static' technique. A similar point might be made against the kind of approving emphasis Malcolm

Bradbury gives to his interpretation of Iris Murdoch in Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel (1973) when he takes a quotation from one of Miss Murdoch's essays as the title for his chapter, 'A House Fit for Free Characters' (pp. 231 - 246).Bradbury in his critical writing seems to be ultimately pro-realist, though sympathetic to other kinds of writing, and a novel like his The History Man (1975) confirms this: so it is not surprising that on page 235 of Possibilities he approvingly quotes Murdoch's dictum that 'Contingency must be defended for it is the essence of personality...A novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in.' The same kind of point is made by her essay 'Against Dryness' (1961) which he chooses as the opening salvo in his anthology The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction (1977). She is worried about the consolations of form that are offered by too 'crystalline' works of art: this 'sense of form...may be a danger to our sense of reality'. The crystal is supposed to be a static and a dry image, as opposed to the larger and more hospitable structures which she suggests would allow human characters to be contingent, real and free. Like Lukács again, she tells us to 'Think of the Russians, those great masters of the contingent.'[68] It is true that selfconscious modernist art is obsessed with its own form, and that in some ways the self-generated independent structure of a crystal is a useful analogy for its products. But crystals in fact invite the observer to find an infinite complexity of structures and of refractions of the light, depending on his own agility. The notion of the novel as a house fit for free characters is a fallacy, because created characters can never be free: they are artefacts, authored patchworks of words, optical illusions visible only to the imaginative eye - and this is where the real freedom and the real dynamism of art is stored, in the

creative imagination of the author and the reader who allows himself to see. It is this kind of freedom and dynamism which selfconscious art-works offer: far from being static, they invite the reader to work for a new definition of what is real and what is true. A panoramic catalogue of the contingent, however vivid, will not in itself encourage us in Trilling's terms to 'drive headlong upon [reality]' (Liberal Imagination, p.221): a passive transcription of appearances is far more likely to leave us passively impressed by them. If Lukács had accepted the radical function of utopian thought and been alive to the analogies of its procedures with those of modernist fiction, it might have occurred to him that modernism was better equipped than either traditional or socialist realism to free men's minds from what he himself describes as 'the sterile power of the merely existent '. (Theory, p.153)

Lukács' invective against such selfconscious writers as Joyce and Beckett in The Meaning of Contemporary Realism[69] is the disappointing end of his brilliant theorising almost four decades earlier about the 'transcendental homelessness' of the novel, his characterisation in Theory of the Novel of a narrative form which pursued its individualistic course across-country and away from the integrated, secure, cooperative values of the epic society with its broad highroads and certain capitals. In his later work he demonstrates real affinities with Leavis and Trilling in his lament for the arrival of the problematic individual in the lonely dream-lands of Kafka or Beckett. When Lukács asks for a 'dynamic and developmental' kind of art, he is overtly looking towards the socialist future.[70] Yet what he evidently really feels is his own sense of loss, his regret for the passing of the Tolstoyan novel

with its richly mimetic surface, its crowded and comprehensive social canvas, its moral passion. There are analogies to the Leavisite regret for a lost cultural golden age.[71] Lukács projects his nostalgia (whose intensity we can guess from the wonderful image quoted earlier of modern man's loss of the stars as a map of divine meaning) into a more ideologically acceptable form by asserting the artist's duty to look towards the revolutionary millenium: yet he really shows himself in all his work to be a particularly articulate victim of the 'homesickness' which Novalis diagnosed as the state of all men who are forced back upon philosophy. Lukács has in fact responded by finding an ideological home in Marxism, whose orthodoxies have their own feudal rigour, and an imaginative home in the nineteenth-century novel, but the symptoms of homesickness are not quite suppressed, and they are closely related to the condition of the modernist novelists he dislikes. If we see our twentieth-century selfconscious novelists as late and extreme examples of a centrally important tendency in creative human thought, philosophical and aesthetic, emerging into the uncomfortable light of self-awareness from the relative darkness of the middle ages,[72] what is most interesting and in many respects most admirable about Woolf, Nabokov, Beckett, Spark, Vonnegut is the way they have recognised and resisted that homesickness, recognised the enormity of moral and metaphysical rootlessness and resisted its concomitant longing for absolute frameworks of order. Refusing to flee to shelter, they have converted their isolation from a symptom into an aesthetic of homelessness, a conceptual plane where no 'truth' is accepted unchallenged as a place of residence and rest. This post-feudal homelessness is indeed the formulating principle of selfconsciousness. In my following chapters we shall see how it inspires the diverse but

always provisional and mythified habitations that selfconscious fictionists build for themselves out of the empty air, deliberately letting the sky show through. If I make my authors sound heroic (in defiance of the interpretation of Lukács, and of Lucien Goldmann as we shall see later) that is because I see their world-building activities as part of a linear descent from the early 'heroic' stage of capitalism, when the middle-classes were literally building a world of cities and industries: those cities were inhabited by philosophers who demanded their own independent theory of knowledge before they consented to 'know their place', and novelists who likewise accepted the risks of metaphysical homelessness as a challenge.

If we now return to the origins of the novel as a literary form rather than a philosophical counter, two more major factors emerge which lead in the direction of selfconsciousness, and again the metaphor of homelessness may seem applicable. I have already considered the significance of the novel's use of prose, and mentioned its historical relationship to the invention of printing, which allowed it to travel widely in search of a home. Even more important are the factors which distinguished it from the earlier oral tradition of narrative, which may briefly be said to be the lack of performance and the lack of appeal to authority. The novel arose after the end of the dominance of oral culture, at a time when the actual presence of the storyteller before his audience was a vivid cultural memory, a lost norm. The element of performance (albeit of written texts) continued to be important however as long as literacy was rare and texts in the vernacular rarer, and of course members of a society without instant entertainment had to retain an all-round competence at entertaining

themselves, whether through popular lyrics and ballads or through the various creative inspirations which Christianity gave, such as the summer festivals of miracle plays. Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims are obviously idealised and transformed by the narrative gifts of the written storyteller who presents them, but the great sequence of tales may serve to remind us that we were all better storytellers before books enfeebled our powers. We were also probably better listeners, and the popular notion of narrative must have been instinctively related to the existence of an authoritative narrator. A narrative which is conveyed to its audience through the mouth of an actual three-dimensional narrator who can charm, woo, authenticate by passionate sincerity, establish common feeling with his audience, excite by the virtuoso improvisations of each particular performance, is on the face of it a much more exciting proposition than a narrative which arrives fixed for ever to the flat and uniform pages of a book. The book appears to have an impossible task, which is to make good the loss simply by narrating itself. With no foreknowledge of its audience or the time and place where it will be read, it must somehow supply the living human context, the immediate home in shared reality, which oral performance offers.

An obvious expedient is to mock up a substitute performer, a vividly actualised narrator, out of words and paper. This, it seems to me, is one excellent justification for the so-called 'intrusive narrator' in fiction: if he intruded, it was a useful violation of a region which might otherwise have been too chaste to win the mass audiences which the novel has found. By flaunting the quirks and quiddities, humour and human failings, of their larger-than-life narrative personae,

Fielding and Sterne were on one level merely supplying a long-established human need. They attempt to show that the narrator of the novel -- even if now more author than actor - is a man like the reader, and therefore the narrative world is one which the latter can enter with pleasure and profit. This may not be quite the situation in epic society where 'singer and listener share the same world and see it the same way', as Scholes and Kellogg put it (Nature of Narrative, p.82), since the world in which the novel arose is no longer unified and homogenous: but essentially the author who introduces himself and points to the human business of writing behind the formality of the printed text seeks to establish a community of feeling with the reader on the other side of it. It is an attempt to construct a meaningful context, using only words, for an act of communication which has become homeless with the end of performance. Selfconsciousness in this sense is a gesture towards the common selfhood of writer and reader. We may note that literal performance of a sort continued so long as books were expensive and life slow enough for the practice of reading aloud to be common. This habit, which Q.D. Leavis notes endured in good health into the nineteenth century,[73] also preserved some element of the pleasure of listening in company, rather than alone, but it has now more or less died out with the competition of instant voices at the flick of a switch, and the twentieth-century novel must make itself live entirely from its own silent resources. This has made it vulnerable to attack from those who see public performance in the arts as a way to escape the solitary and élitist dimensions of artistic creation and response, as I shall discuss later. Yet writers like Norman Mailer are still valiantly pursuing the attempt to give their readers a live narrative performer, and the extrovert narrator of

Tristram Shandy quite meets his match in the marvellous narrator of Why Are We in Vietnam (1967), a parody of the twentieth century's most popular performer, the disc jockey, 'D.J. to the world': 'You're contending with a genius, D.J. is his name, only American alive who could outtalk Cassius Clay, that's lip, duck the blip...it's right on your radar screen...'[74]

I said that not only the element of performance but also the 'appeal to authority' was lost in the long process which replaced the bard and his familiar stock of material by the enclosed systems of books. Oral formulaic tradition is just that, traditional. Scholes and Kellogg put it thus:

> The epic story-teller is telling a traditional story. The primary impulse which moves him is not a historical one, nor a creative one: it is re-creative. He is retelling a traditional story, and therefore his primary allegiance is not to fact, not to truth, not to entertainment, but to the mythos itself...(p.12)

Each performer (and each performance) would improvise upon this acquired narrative vocabulary, but it was essential that the tales told were of established histories and heroes, vices and virtues which were unquestioned common wisdom. The performer appealed to an all-embracing authority, the pre-existent tale and the series of singers before him who had handed it down. The practice of appealing to already existing material - classical or Christian, folk-tale or courtly legend, philosophy or moral discourse - carried on down through the centuries: the Canterbury Tales are full of instances where the lay narrators appeal to 'auctoritee',and Shakespeare's genius was not at all averse to borrowing plots.[75] With our postromantic veneration for the new we might think of all this as restrictive, but an unexpanded remark of

Scholes and Kellogg points in the opposite direction:

> The oral singer illustrates the extremest form of the individual talent at the service of the tradition, also perhaps the extremest form of the tradition at the service of the individual talent. (p.24)

The ways in which a strongly-established tradition can protect and support the artist are apparent when we consider the different case of the novel, which fractures the pattern almost entirely by claiming to be original, the fruit of one individual's experience and opinions of the world, not a communally validated myth.

In this sense the novel was truly novel, as Ian Watt points out when he distinguishes Defoe and Richardson in this respect from 'Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton', all the great predecessors.[76] Defoe and Richardson indeed both in their different ways muted the element of daring in what they were doing by supporting fiction with the appearance of fact: when Defoe pretended to be only the editor of Robinson Crusoe, he in effect substituted a bogus factuality for the pre-existent mythos of the epic, the Chaucerian auctoritee.[77] But Defoe was found out, and it became accepted practice that the novelist should invent his own tale and send it about the world. When we find appeals to authority in contemporary selfconscious novelists like Borges and Nabokov - 'found' manuscripts, fake editorial prefaces, quotations from invented authors, inclusion of real historical characters among the false - they must be viewed with suspicion, as we shall see in my chapters discussing individual authors, where we shall find examples of all the above devices: they now tend to have a strictly ironic and inverted function, serving to undercut the reader's belief in any objective reality, even that of history, rather than asserting that what is 'life-like' must be true, and worth reading. The full radicalism

of this triumphant twentieth-century rejection of authority becomes clear if we return to the novel's first departure from tradition and consider how much novelists lost and how much they risked by comparison with the securely-rooted singer of the oral tradition.

At the lowest level, the appeal to authority of some kind is part of everyday human experience. The concept of originality is exciting but it is also frightening, because whatever emerges from my mind alone must be grounds for a judgement of me: so we take shelter behind cardboard cut-outs - 'It's a lousy book, according to the reviews.' Happily most of the speech and action we individually author is transient in its effects, which helps diminish the fearfulness. But writing condemns us to judgement much more inexorably - and forever. The production of an original literary text may therefore seem painfully foolhardy. In this respect critics have a far easier time than creative writers, since the creative writers supply the raw material which justifies the critics' subsequent excursions. Critics write about, a superficially sensible procedure, creative writers merely write, lacking the safety net of a basis in logical fact. The early novelists were 'creative' in an unprecedented fashion, acting in accord with the spirit of the age which, as we have seen, asserted that an appeal to individual first-hand investigation rather than established authority might be the best way of understanding the world. They were willing to accept that whatever narratives they propagated came fresh from their own individual brains, as naked and cold as new-born Tristram Shandy, 'brought forth into this scurvy and disastrous world of ours' on that wintry yet unpredictably pyrotechnical day, 5 November , to be 'pelted with a set of as pitiful adventures and cross accidents as ever small

HERO sustained ' (Tristram Shandy, p.40). The notion of originality is no longer strange: the individually-authored art-work became so much the orthodoxy of postromantic aesthetics that it has inspired a robust countercult of joint authorship, collective improvisation, and such ambiguous artefacts as the 'borrowed' texts and re-told tales of Borges' infinitely subtle appeals to tradition. It has also inspired some more worrying anti-individualist trends in critical theory, as we shall see later. But for all that history has confirmed it into orthodoxy, originality retains its terrors. The critics have become vastly more numerous and professional since the days when Sterne placed himself in the hands of

'THE REVIEWERS
of
MY BREECHES,' (Tristram Shandy,p.500)

and they are poised in their print-black battalions to pelt the child with 'pitiful misadventures and cross accidents' as soon as he arrives - which is enough to make any novelist, however much of a 'HERO', selfconscious. Some regressive part of him may well long for a home in the bosom of higher authority then.

The problem of originality is a major pressure towards self-consciousness of an uncomfortable kind, because it may seem like overweening arrogance to pose the self as originator before the public eye. The twentieth-century novelist who does not collaborate or hide behind a pseudonym is in effect saying that he is competent to add to the stock of created matter, and in so doing he likens himself to God (the analogy is made consciously, and in many moods, by selfconscious writers from Spark to Nabokov, as we shall see.) Our religious sense is perhaps not sufficiently atrophied for us to do this without a

curious compound of guilt, anxiety, and hubristic exaltation - all of which elements may be vital parts of critical selfconsciousness. The novel form arose, however, when God was very much more of a reality, when individual signature was not an established part of aesthetics, and when the notion that narrative should be part of a collective heritage was not yet dead. It is unsurprising then that the early novelists were ebulliently conscious of their own daring, selfconscious in the light-hearted and adventurous manner of explorers at the beginning of a mission, addressing their audience as directly as any absent performer, quelling the silence with a dramatised narrator who identified more boldly and more perilously with his materials than ever those vanished singers, servants of oral tradition and dwellers in the mansion-house of epic order, ever did.

My preceding characterisation of the early novelist as a homeless adventurer and metaphysical rebel would probably read very oddly indeed to the average non-academic reader, who thinks of 'the novel' as the nineteenth-century novel (and its twentieth-century unselfconscious imitators), and vaguely associates the novel form with warmth and plenty, a world of character and colour and vivid reality where the author seems solidly and pleasantly at home and invites the reader to make himself likewise. There are two caricature versions of the nineteenth century for the literary critic, depending on whether he deals with poetry or prose: the poets apparently occupied a world of unbridled subjectivism and lonely introspection, while the novelists occupied a busy, bustling, objective and enormously sociable world. In a short survey we must of necessity adopt the latter view, especially as it seems so closely related to the unselfconscious stereotype of

the novel which emerged from this period as the central fictional type, and which has been effective in banishing the selfconscious novel to the peripheries. In the nineteenth-century novel the balance between subject and object tips heavily back in favour of the object: the novelist appears far more interested in the drama of the world outside him than in the drama of his own attempts to make sense or make stories of it. The novel as a relatively new and unrigid form, and one of a certain size, must have seemed the ideal vehicle to do justice to a new world, with its expanding empires and correspondingly expansive vision of the size and riches of the physical world. More important perhaps in determining the fundamentally earnest tone of the nineteenth-century novelist is the accompanying mood of expansionism in human intellectual activity, the giant strides taken by science, especially, which still seemed a marvellous machine with an improved if not perfect future for all mankind in its power. This was an age of progress, from the point of view of favoured western civilisations at least, and the flavour is caught in the full title of its greatest scientific work, Darwin's Origin of Species (1859), more properly On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection; or, the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life. Though Darwin exposed the falsehood of the progressive and purposive assumptions underlying the nineteenth century's earlier theory of evolution, Lamarck's Zoological Philosophy (1809), his own title's phraseology reveals a somewhat kindred turn of mind, for the 'favoured' were 'preserved', and the 'struggle' by implication was to be won. New social and political orders were in the making, with revolution in France and a growing franchise in England, men seemed to be making enormous strides in every sphere from the medical to the moral, and the increased powers of

precision and analysis in the sciences were parallelled in art by an increased technical competence in the field of realistic representation - and with such a dynamic real world to represent, small wonder if the novelist grew a little less interested in the philosophical problematics of narration.

There was also one part of the overall pattern of increased wealth, increased education and social mobility which acted as a far more specific inducement to realism for the artist: I mean the enormous popular audience for art which developed during the century, a phenomenon which an early twentieth-century critic like Ortega Y Gasset looks upon as an embarrassing aberration[78] but which the isolated artist of the late twentieth century may sometimes consider with passionate regret. Despite the earlier Leavisite disdain for Dickens[79] and the disfavour into which Thackeray fell, as we shall see, once a novelistic school of opposing taste arose, these two gentlemen are by now generally acclaimed as excellent and serious artists, and it therefore seems extravagantly strange by comparison with our own state of affairs that they enjoyed huge audiences of ordinary people, not twenty years later but at the very time of writing, through serialisation. In the sphere of the visual arts, the same thing held true. The Royal Academy's Great Victorian Pictures exhibition of summer 1978 (sometimes advertised as 'Victorian Pops') assembled astonishing evidence of popular response to the annual Royal Academy show: the catalogue tells how Wilkie's Chelsea Pensioners reading the Gazette of the Battle of Waterloo, shown at the Academy in 1822, had to be 'railed off from the mob of its admirers', and in 1874 a policeman had to be installed to control the crowds gathering around Elizabeth Thompson's The Roll Call

(Catalogue p.79). Faced by just such a large popular audience, the novelist clearly often felt an overwhelming duty to the demanding world outside him - not just to do it justice but to do his readers good. The title of Flaubert's masterpiece, Sentimental Education (1869), ironic in terms of its own ending in memories of a brothel, would serve as a suitably solemn title to many of the novels of his age. Moreover the serious statement of intent he made in a letter to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie is a useful indicator of a very much changed tone from the days of Cervantes and Sterne:

> ...I have been hard at work on a novel of modern life set in Paris. I want to write the moral history, or rather the sentimental history, of the men of my generation.[80]

The overall orientation is clearly objective and extraverted, despite the subtle and steely self-awareness of Flaubert's internal descriptive techniques. Robert Alter thinks that the selfconscious novel was 'in eclipse' throughout the century, making a convincing case about the nineteenth century's new interest in politics and social history, its ambition to define its age rather than its own aesthetic (Partial Magic, pp. 84 - 137). He rejects from the selfconscious tradition on these grounds even Thackeray, who would seem a most obvious descendant from his admired master Fielding and who was attacked as the epitome of intrusive narration by the early twentieth century 'show-not-tell' orthodoxy which I shall shortly discuss.

My view of selfconsciousness is less exclusive than Alter's: I have already said that I cannot agree that the selfconscious novel must have 'no ultimate extra-literary aims', as he states to substantiate his theory of eclipse (Partial Magic, p. 85). I therefore see a major

shift of emphasis but no total eclipse, for novelists like Thackeray and Dickens continue to dramatise their novelistic function, even if that function has become subordinate to the more active drama of their age. They were Victorians, and I have just noted the Victorian tendency to both sentiment and sententiousness: their conception of themselves as writers was thus naturally framed with this particularly heavy confection of gilt and curlicues, but they are still very much aware of their relationship both to their reader and their material. Alter's synthetic account does indeed work very well for most of the great nineteenth-century panoramic novelists, the ones who condition an orthodox view both of 'the novel' and its most successful age. But I want to dispute the comprehensiveness of his theory through the specific example of Thackeray, which raises some interesting questions not only about the status of selfconsciousness as a basically continuous tradition but also about the way in which selfconscious narration relates to the reader and the world.

My case is that Thackeray's narrative persona in Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero (1847 - 1848) only differs by reason of its more noticeably episodic and ambivalent sense of identity from Sterne's or Fielding's selfconscious narrator. It is true that the nineteenth-century narrator tends to become intensely involved in the shape and life of the events he narrates, at which times he forgets himself: and when he does remember himself, he is more likely to step forward in the role of Steady Moral Companion than sly artist. Nevertheless, Moral Companion is still a role, and it is the role of a creator of moralistic fictions, not a literal priest. Alter says that Thackeray fails to qualify as 'truly selfconscious' (p.115) because he sometimes confuses

fact and fiction and allows the odd mist of tearful 'extra-literary emotion' to cloud the literary lens. (p.119) He sees an irresolvable dichotomy between the two projections of Thackeray which appear in Vanity Fair, the flamboyant artificer who insists he is presiding at a puppet-show or fairground and asks us to admire the 'famous little Becky puppet',[81] and the author-as-autobiographer who insists he was present at certain of its events, has researched the evidence behind the narrative, and knows the characters personally. The puppeteer of course insists on the work's fictionality, the autobiographer appears to assert its truth, and Alter feels that Thackeray's assertions of authenticity are to be read without irony and therefore simply betoken the author's confusion. I disagree that Thackeray's assertions of authenticity lack an ironic function: it seems to me that they gain it precisely from their juxtaposition with the undercutting contradictions of the showman, and I think the conflict in surface logic is resolved in the many-layered linkages of literature. The point of an irony is that two contradictory layers of meaning exist, the deceptively real blue-sea surface and the teeth underneath them, and when in the wider context of the whole book authentications of the narrative matter co-exist with statements of ironic detachment, that only enlarges the ironic effect to apply to the final amalgam.

Sometimes indeed the ironic and authentic poses come delicately together.

> I protest it is quite shameful in the world to abuse a simple creature, as people of her time abuse Becky, and I warn the public against believing one-tenth of the stories against her.

The present tense carries its usual authenticating function ('they go on doing it out there, whatever we do in here'), and the phrase 'people

of her time' implies a world of real people related to Becky but outside the author's control, since they abuse her despite his admonition. But on the other hand, the time 'whereof we are writing' is supposed to be 25 years before the actual process of composition, as Thackeray reminds us in a directly following passage, so that the present tense is immediately placed in fictional parenthesis.[82] More, his evocation of 'the people of her time' is bracketed together with a direct invocation to 'the public', i.e. his public, judges of a fictional Becky puppet, readers of a literary work. Alter's example of an 'assertion of the truth of the story [which] has none of the ironic duplicity of Cervantes' (Partial Magic p.118) is the passage where Thackeray asserts that he actually met Dobbin and Amelia as a tourist in Germany:

> It was on this very tour that I, the present writer of a history of which every word is true, had the pleasure to see them first, and to make their acquaintance.[83]

Yet that phrase, 'the present writer of a history of which every word is true', certainly has a duplicitous ring for me: a self-identification of almost epic proportions, stuffed into the middle of a sentence of inappropriate slightness, it bulges with suspect rotundity and is far too superficially naive to be anything but cunning. In fact Thackeray plays like Cervantes upon the pleasurable dizziness generated by swiftly changing perspectives. He knows that although the reader will enjoy being asked to imagine, for the necessary duration of the action, that his author (a likable chap) actually knows little Tom Eaves, actually toured the infamous Steyne's town-house, has easy access to the world of high and low,-that reader has a recurrent awareness that a fictional 'curtain' went up at the beginning of 'this singular performance', will come down at the end, and twitch whenever the 'Manager of the Performance'

in the wings gets restless.[84]

Alter feels that the two different manifestations of the author are simply 'discontinuous' (p.118), and indicts Thackeray with an 'underlying confusion' (p.120). Though I would prefer the term 'polarity' to 'discontinuity', discontinuities are more fashionable of late than Alter's negative usage implies, with texts like those of the new novelists, and sympathetic accounts of their procedures like Frank Kermode's in Novel and Narrative.[85] I think we must accept that human attention and passion is fluctuating, multilayered and essentially discontinuous. The novel as a discursive form will always reflect more of these contradictions, as it develops through time, than for example lyric poem or painting, and Thackeray is admittedly a particularly digressive, spontaneous and sprawling novelist. But the reader's attention, and the nature and degree of his commitment to the text, exists in time also and is therefore equally discontinuous and changeable. He is unlikely to be appalled and perplexed when his text to some extent reflects himself, though he may learn a great deal from studying the reflection. These facts, I think, are essential to the effectiveness of selfconscious novels, which play upon the adaptability and suppleness of human understanding. They must always work on two opposed fronts, first convincing us that their created world relates to our own and in some vivid sense 'exists', then pointing to its ultimate location in an imagined cosmos. (The last stage of understanding is of course that only the author who does the imagining really exists, and his reader's imagination following him, but this only becomes entirely explicit in twentieth-century selfconscious writing.) It would seem likely from the text that Thackeray was indeed pulled two ways between,

on the one hand, the sheer painterly delights of his instinctive and passionate function as a world-maker, making it so real that he almost believes it is there, and on the other hand his superior function as moral puppeteer and wit, with the opportunities it offered for intellectual mobility and rhetorical flourish. But such a conflict of loyalties must always be present in the ironic synthesis of the selfconscious writer, and I think the effects are productive for both reader and writer. In the exemplary case of Nabokov (whose selfconsciousness Alter after all applauds),[86] the element of impassioned mimesis, hypernaturally vivid and detailed simulation of a physical world which defies disbelief, is an essential counterpoint to that primary vision of the author which is all acrobat and tricks in empty air. Irony, distance, shifts of perspective, authorial acrobatics do not work unless there is a living centre for them to play on, as much hopelessly sterile contemporary art too clearly illustrates - most of the stories in John Barth's Lost in the Funhouse being a case in point.

The critic who feels that conflicting levels of fact and fiction must confuse the reader is guilty of serious underestimation: Thackeray does not similarly underestimate him. I have already spoken of the importance for the early selfconscious novelists of replacing the vanished performance context with a dramatised relationship between author and reader. Thackeray's bigoted and stupid creation, 'Jones' who sits reading Vanity Fair in his club and inscribing his disapproval in the work's margins, is both an implicit compliment to his real, much cleverer reader and a way of keeping him up to the mark.[87] The competence of the average reader to handle complexity and contradiction

in his everyday life is an act of faith for the selfconscious writer. Woolf actually appeals to her readership therefore as a potential agent for literary reform, a body of opinion which may help to dissuade literary men from promulgating simplistic versions of the truth -

> May I end by venturing to remind you of the duties and responsibilities that are yours as partners in this business of writing books...In the course of your daily life this past week...You have heard scraps of talk that filled you with amazement. You have gone to bed at night bewildered by the complexity of your feelings. In one day...thousands of emotions have met, collided and disappeared in astonishing disorder. Nevertheless, you allow the writers to palm off upon you a version of all this..which has no likeness to that surprising apparition...[88]

Thackeray may tend to emphasize the moral compact between author and reader, and their shared susceptibility to sentiment, but he also addresses his reader as an intellectual equal, and one of whom he can make certain demands. He assumes his readership is as imaginatively agile as he is, moving freely between low cynicism and high sentiment, Gaunt Square and Mr. Moss's 'spunging-house',[89] and perfectly capable of entertaining two or more propositions which classical logic would deem incompatible. In short, he assumes the competence of his reader as a partner in the process of world-creation, as well as a virtuous fellow-citizen of a real moral world. The most important point developing from Alter's discussion of Thackeray is in fact this issue of the reader's own recourse to fictions and subsequent competence as a fiction-maker, for the selfconscious novel derives its vital energies from an assumption of the universality of fictions, fiction as something which infiltrates the lives of writers and readers alike. The weight of enthusiastic emotion and rococo physical decoration in Vanity Fair need not prevent it operating as a selfconscious fictional construct

if we accept that the reader is just as capable as the writer of revelling in sensuous and sentimental excess while accepting the periodic reminder that all is vanity, all flesh is fictional grass, and at the end the puppets must be returned to their box with that resounding 'Vanitas Vanitatum' - a cry of disillusionment at once moral and metaphysical.[90]

I do not think Thackeray can be excluded from the selfconscious tradition just because he shows the stamp of a century on the whole more didactic, more emotional, more excited about its own history and geography and the perfectibilism of mankind than the centuries which preceded or followed it. When we sample the sheer vitriol of Ford Maddox Ford's dismissal of Thackeray as the most intrusive author of them all -

> No author would, like Thackeray, today intrude his broken nose and myopic spectacles into the middle of the most thrilling scene he ever wrote, in order to tell you that, though his heroine was rather a wrong'un, his heart was in his [sic] right place...
>
> The English Novel: From the Earliest Days to the Death of Joseph Conrad (1930), p.137

- it seems that the poor defamed nose ought at least to be given an honoured welcome to the ranks of selfconscious narrators. He is certainly excluded forever from the club which was shortly to be set up by those who, as Ford said, 'kept themselves, their comments and their prejudices out of their works, and...rendered rather than told ' (ibid.), This 'show-not-tell' orthodoxy, which took an immediate base in the creative works of Henry James (also Joseph Conrad, and Ford himself) and the critical precepts of James and his less flexible followers Percy Lubbock and Joseph Warren Beach, was in one respect a direct continuation and exaggeration of the twentieth century's

reverence for realism, progress and the magnificent impersonality of science: but it coincided with, and was reinforced by, the rigorous and austere procedures of the early twentieth-century emergence of literary criticism as an academic discipline. It is hard to over-emphasize the hold which these two related orthodoxies enjoyed over the literary imagination for almost half a century (in many academic bastions they hold it still, but no longer unchallenged), and this makes all the more astonishing the reversal which has taken place with the re-emergence of the selfconscious novel in the second half of the twentieth century. In order to show the nature of the revolution which my selfconscious authors achieved, I shall briefly examine some of the premises of early twentieth-century fiction, and their reinforcement by the new academic and critical hierarchy.

Henry James' fiction, and especially the great series of Prefaces to the re-edition of Novels and Tales,1907-1901),[91] established the early twentieth century's powerful fictional norm of the novel as a narrative conducted from within the consciousness of one or more of its characters with no explicit help from their own creator, a narrative whose most intricate art was expended on the mysterious internal convolutions of thought. The Jamesian novel[92] conformed to a symbolist aesthetic of the art-work as discrete, impersonal, concentrated, something alchemized out of the rude hands of the maker on to a higher plane of existence. In such an intense and rarefied world, there was no room for the intrusive ironies of the selfconscious narrator. Any appearance of the author in the world he had in fact created would destroy the all-important illusion of realism and internal coherence: the secret was to show ('Look - no hands') rather than tell (with a

recognisably authorial and human voice), for the world of the art-work was too special thus to be linked with a real man in the real world outside it. James was a selfconscious artist in the sense that he thought long and brilliantly about his art, but he confined his own voice, his own speculations and comments in the capacity of artificer, to the Prefaces, and presented his actual novels to the world as perfect artefacts, crystalline and complete, with none of the engaging openness and vitality, the gaps where scaffolding and builder show through, that characterise my own kind of selfconscious artist. It was James who made a famous remark, on the face of it highly appropriate to my subject, in 'The Future of the Novel':

> It arrived, in truth, the novel, late at self-consciousness; but it has done its utmost ever since to make up for lost opportunities.[93]

However the date of the remark, 1899, is in fact entirely <u>in</u>appropriate to the history of selfconsciousness in my sense, since the shifting dialectic of taste would not dictate a revival of selfconsciousness in force for another half-century. Moreover my introduction has been concerned to insist that the novel first arrived, in truth, very early indeed at selfconsciousness, since selfconsciousness was an essential component of the historical shift of thought which produced prose fiction. In fact James means something very different, that the novel arrived very late at a sense of its own critical respectability, and he himself at the time of that statement was doing his utmost single-handedly to 'make up for lost opportunities '. But the school of thought about the novel which he was to found (unwittingly, and with no possible responsibility for its duller and more pedagoguic excesses in the hands of Percy Lubbock, to take an early and influential example,[94] or its more arrogant and racy strains as developed by

Ford Maddox Ford, tended to elevate fiction to critical respectability by over-purifying its nature, narrowing its resources, eliminating the delightful but possibly dubious plurality of its moods and voices. The third-person Jamesian novel in its scrupulous attention to nuance of thought and language and its unquestioning reverence for the matter related is in fact very like an extended poem.

Malcolm Bradbury has written in Possibilities (pp. 5-7) about the poeticisation of the novel in the early part of this century: and poetry, as I suggested earlier in this introduction, has often been conceived to be a 'higher' medium than prose. None of James' chapters are merely made 'of Paper', like Fielding's (Tom Jones, p.151), in other words of jokes or ironies or distancing manoeuvres: each of them is transubstantiated by

> ...the irresistible determinant ... of his interest in the story as such: it is ever, obviously, overwhelmingly, the prime and precious thing...[95]

This is alchemist's language indeed, and loftily far from Sterne's concept of the story as a mad steeplechase run backwards in time to before its own beginnings. There are obvious reasons why a century just engaged in the difficult process of establishing literary criticism in the vernacular as a respectable academic subject - Oxford started its English school in 1893, Cambridge in 1917, as David Lodge describes in his essay 'Crosscurrents in Modern English Criticism'[96] - was eager to deal with something more obviously dignified and manageable than Shandyesque steeplechasers with a talent for vertiginous metaphysics. When the poetry and criticism of T.S. Eliot and the critical theories of I.A. Richards established the short lyric poem as the exemplary object for literary-critical studies, they naturally

reinforced the novel's current tendency to refine and poeticise its structures.[97] Even novelists who would ultimately revert to something less etiolated shared this poetic orientation: Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) might well be re-titled A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Poet, and in certain pieces from A Haunted House: and other stories (1944) and most memorably The Waves (1931) Virginia Woolf consistently uses a poetically heightened and almost metrical prose.

Despite this poeticisation of fiction Malcolm Bradbury remarks in Possibilities on the lateness of the novel's arrival at the centre of the new literary-critical establishment compared with the poem's, and says that 'one might wonder why.' (p.5) The primary answer is surely a practical one which suggests the perennial shortcomings of a tradition of literary criticism which is geared to function, as the study of literature in the context of education and examination must be: the poem was short and manageable, geared to the necessities of teaching for an hour or writing an hour's examination essay. It was also an easily isolated object of study in the sense that it was far more clearly separated from the distressing heterogeneity of everyday discourse than prose, far more easily turned into an exemplary object or New Critical well-wrought urn (see e.g. Cleanth Books, The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (New York, 1947)). A test-tube would be as suitable an image of containment, since the essential trend was towards the separation of the specimen, in scrupulously clean conditions, for respectable academic investigation. The English literature men had to prove they could be as rigorous as scientists or classicists, and therefore as worthy of a place in

academe. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), Eliot uses an image which indicates the whole temper of a critical movement which was intrinsically hostile to the wilful and idiosyncratic, personal and eccentric quality of selfconscious fiction:

> I...invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of heavy filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide...the mind of the poet is the shred of platinum.[98]

The mind of the selfconscious novelist, on the whole, is not, and refuses to be, a shred of platinum: it is a far less predictable entity, and it belongs to a real live merely human author, with allegiances to the disorganised world outside the protective covers of the book. No wonder then that the selfconscious novel during this period to some extent 'went underground' as the majority of novelists tried to conform to the impersonal and poetic norms of James and the New Criticism - though as we shall see, it was only in such novel theory as there was that it disappeared completely, and not in practice.

The New Critical emphasis on the impersonality and autotelic status of the art-work was not an insular one: the symbolist influence which lay behind it had been cosmopolitan, and critics in many countries accordingly produced allied pronouncements, with Ortega Y Gasset proclaiming The Dehumanisation of Art (1925) and Roman Jakobson enraging Trotsky by declaring that 'poetry means the giving of form to the word, which is valuable in itself'.[99] Ortega said that 'The poet begins where the man ends'.[100] The essay has become a locus classicus of twentieth-century criticism, but if his predictions had been universally applied the selfconscious novel would have pined away and died: the poet may 'begin where the man ends', but the selfconscious

novelist is inescapably focussed on man, both as maker of fictions and their essential object. Fortunately critics espoused the notion much more consistently than artists (critics, after all, have the artists' work to inspire them, whereas artists may even be forced back for inspiration upon a theoretically discarded human world.) But critics, too, eventually registered a powerful reaction away from the notions of impersonality and autotelism, a reaction which is now reaching high tide with the emergence of selfconscious fiction to full critical acceptance. The reaction could not begin until the novel became an object of serious study for literary critics and scholars in its own right, rather than as a somewhat overgrown and shambling relative of the poem.

It was not until after World War II and especially in the 1950s that the novel started to receive attention from academic critics in any quantity, as for example Malcolm Bradbury (Possibilities, p.7) and Robert Murray Davis have noted.[101] The latter in his introduction to The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism (1969) gives an illustrative list of post-1948 fiction criticism (p.ix). One signal production from the point of view of our study is a long and scholarly essay published by Norman Friedman in 1955, 'Point of View in Fiction: the Development of a Critical Concept', which is included in Murray Davis' collection (pp. 142-169). He starts by quoting Aldous Huxley's character Phillip Quarles, challenging the virtues of the current vogue for impersonality in fiction (Point Counter Point, 1928) - '"But need the author be so retiring? I think we're a bit too squeamish about personal appearances nowadays."'(p.142) Then Friedman selects subsequent critical pronouncements which seem to prove that 'for

better or for worse, then,...our 'squeamishness' has won the day '. The rest of the essay substantiates this claim by a sketch of the history of '"the disappearance of the author"' (Bradford A. Booth, quoted ibid.), interestingly showing how what began as a highbrow conception had filtered down into a 'spate' of popular manuals with titles like A Handbook on Story Writing (Blanche Colton Williams, 1917), so that the orthodoxy spread across every level of fiction and apparently held absolute sway (p.148). Friedman's story ends with the actual 'extinction of the author' (p.163), something Friedman records with many misgivings, not doubting however that it is the terminus of a logically progressive development forward from the omniscient commentary of a novelist like Fielding.

However, in another few years Friedman's diagnosis of 'extinction' would not have been possible, as academics began to notice that authors unlike dodos could make amazing comebacks from untimely graves. In 1957 Northrop Frye's seminal Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton) gave an infinitely expanded perspective to literary criticism which undermined any such 'progressive' accounts of literary development as Percy Lubbock's in The Craft of Fiction and pointed out by implication that narrative had not steadily improved since the days when novelists appeared in their texts as foursquare as the minstrel to his audience (to Lubbock a telling index of the primitive nature of intrusive narration,[102] to me in my account suggestive evidence for its long pedigree and central importance to narrative art.) Frye's notion that each form of narrative convention had its own special merits and special rules is also the basis of Wayne C. Booth's major study, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961). One of its central purposes is

to rescue the intrusive author from the contempt of the Jamesian orthodoxy, taking the two premises which had been most confidently used against narration - '"True Novels Must Be Realistic"' and '"All Authors Should Be Objective"' - as the titles of two chapters which trace their development 'From Justified Revolt to Crippling Dogma'. (pp. 23-64 and 67-86). He demonstrates convincingly how in the world of fiction 'realism' and 'objectivity' are in no sense 'natural' but the product of rhetoric, so that there is no reason why the author should not be part of the rhetorical structure also. Like Frye, Wayne Booth moves over an enormous amount of material from different ages and cultures, rather than simply looking at the history of the novel, which had been all too easy for Lubbock and Ford to simplify into a linear advance: this could simply not be done with narrative from Homer to J.D. Salinger. Scholes and Kellogg with their own impressively wide cultural perspective show in <u>The Nature of Narrative</u> that the reversal may have been belated, but it was complete. Writing in 1966 five years after Booth they make the following judgements:

> The Jamesian method tends to lead inevitably to the death of narrative art by a kind of artistic suicide. The narrator is to eliminate himself for the good of his art... (p.270)
>
> James' influence tends to run counter to the whole flow of narrative, creating not a wave of the future in narrative but a momentary eddy on the surface of narrative history. (pp. 271-272)

It was the relativism of scholarship which reinstated the selfconscious narrator to respectability, not the value-judgements of criticism which first banished him. Scholes and Kellogg realise this and indict James' disciples for presumption.

> Criticism can never reduce art to rules. Its aim should be not to enact legislation for artists but to promote understanding of works of art. (ibid)

The partial, coercive and simplistic nature of some of the theorising which academic literary criticism earlier in this century imposed upon the novel, failing to acknowledge its basically ungeneric and shape-shifting nature and failing to understand the length and variety of its history, is one justification for the persistent hostility shown towards critics by selfconscious novelists like Beckett - ' Crritic! '[sic]- and Nabokov, with his despised 'criticules '.[103]

The novelists were rebelling against the 'dogma' of impersonality that was erected from their own 'justified rebellion', to use Wayne Booth's terms, almost before the initial rebellion against contingency and realism was finished, even though this counter-revolution did not impinge upon the linear logic of critical accounts. Joyce's much-quoted dictum from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man in 1916 (and it is the fictional artist-as-young-man who speaks, not Joyce), that 'the personality of the artist...finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak',[104] is refuted by a cri-de-coeur from Ulysses (1922), where his fictional creature Molly blows the author's cover entirely when she exclaims, still delightfully in character even as she undermines the idea of 'real' characters, ' O Jamesy let me up out of this...' [105] A la recherche du temps perdu appeared between 1913 and 1927, and though Proust's great work was in many ways a symbolist-influenced production (as indeed were Joyce's and Woolf's) it also opened towards the more direct presentation of the artist at work which later selfconscious writers adopted, and elevated the fictions of memory and imagination above literal fidelity to the present fact. The 1920s spanned the publication of the 'show-

not-tell' bible, Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction (1921) and a lesser but even more dogmatic one, Ford's The English Novel (1930), from which we have already had occasion to quote. Yet in between the two a more liberal professional novelist, E.M. Forster, in his famous Aspects of the Novel (1927) dismissed the tyranny of 'point-of-view' in Lubbock (with detached acclaim for his critical ingenuity) and asserted that

> the whole question of method resolves itself not into formulae but into the power of the writer to bounce the reader into accepting what he says...[106]

Gide's Les Faux-Monnayeurs, with its intricate and knowing dissection of the transformation of life into literature, appeared in 1926: and the same decade saw Virginia Woolf publish the first of her major works which decisively discussed its own fictional problems and processes, Jacob's Room (1922). It also saw the beginnings of the adult careers of Nabokov (his first novel, Mary, was published in 1926 and the wholly selfconscious King, Queen, Knave in 1928) and Beckett, who in 1928 embarked on his all-important two years employed as a lecteur at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the Paris of the Surrealists, transition and James Joyce, and published the first essay of Our Éxagmination in 1929.[107] The 1930s with their ominous awareness of economic collapse, the rise of fascism and the crumbling of the communist ideal (show trials in Russia, failure in Spain) impelled a great many writers to a dutiful commitment to a realist aesthetic, because this seemed to be a token of commitment to the world of events: portraits of the artist therefore tended to be portraits of the artist-as-decent-sort-in-troubled-world, and virtual autobiography was the norm. Yet this was the decade in which Virginia Woolf wrote The Waves (1931) and Between the Acts (only published posthumously, in 1941): Beckett's extraordinary More Pricks than Kicks (1934) and Murphy (1938) were published, and Nabokov produced The Defence (1930), The Eye (1930),

Glory (1932), Laughter in the Dark (1932), Invitation to a Beheading (1935) and Despair (1936). Less central appearances perhaps from the retrospective point of view of literary tradition but still indicative, there were such eccentrically engaging works as Stevie Smith's Novel on Yellow Paper: or, Work it Out for Yourself (1936) and Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two-Birds (1939) which from their opposed standpoints of rambling conversation and involuted rhetoric both showed an entire disregard for conventional notions of realistic narrative, and asserted the author's right to individual artifice and an individual voice. The horrors of war helped to kill Virginia Woolf in 1941, but the appalling realities of the time did not stop my other two central authors, Nabokov and Beckett, from producing steadily, as indeed Nabokov did until his death in 1977 and as Beckett does (in decreasing volume) until the present day. The 1950s marked the rise of the nouveau roman in France, superficially alien to the selfconscious mode and yet showing many marked resemblances: its total violation of the accepted canons of descriptive realism, narrative structure and character constitute a defiant notification of its own artificial and 'authored' nature. Each of Alain Robbe-Grillet's works is in this sense a 'portrait of the artist', even though nothing so anthropomorphic as an author is allowed on to the page, and he and Nathalie Sarraute show themselves to be highly articulate examples of critical selfconsciousness in their actual critical writing (see Robbe-Grillet's Snapshots and Towards a New Novel (1965), Sarraute's Tropisms and The Age of Suspicion (1963).[108]

The late 1950s as we have just seen also saw the rise in more orthodox critical circles of a temper more sympathetic to what Alter wryly suggests might be called 'The Other Great Tradition' (Partial Magic, p.ix), and thus we have arrived at the home ground of the last two decades

where it might be said that selfconsciousness has come into its own.

The following list of authors is hopelessly incomplete but it may serve to indicate the extent of the phenomenon I am investigating, and the prominence of many selfconscious practitioners. Since the attribute of selfconsciousness cannot constitute a watertight category, and individual works by a single author may differ very much in their narrative mode, I have erred on the side of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, believing the former vice is one less foreign to the novelist's temperament. I suggest we look for selfconsciousness as a vital part of the aesthetic of the following living writers, among very many others:-

John Barth
Donald Barthelme
Samuel Beckett
John Berger
J. L. Borges
Richard Brautigan
Christine Brooke-Rose
Brigid Brophy
Anthony Burgess
Alan Burns
Michel Butor
Angela Carter
Robert Coover
J. P. Donleavy
Lawrence Durrell
Eva Figes
John Fowles
Michael Frayne
William Golding
Witold Gombrowicz
Giles Gordon
Gunther Grass
John Hawkes
Joseph Heller
Rayner Heppenstall
Gabriel Josipovici
Doris Lessing
David Lodge
Norman Mailer
Nicholas Moseley
Flann O'Brien
Thomas Pynchon
Raymond Queneau

Alain Robbe-Grillet
Philip Roth
J.D.Salinger
Nathalie Sarraute
Alan Sheridan
Claude Simon
Muriel Spark
Emma Tennant
John Updike
Gore Vidal
Kurt Vonnegut
Tom Wolfe

A list establishes nothing but the fact that with true obedience to the principle of regular literary shift which David Lodge bases on Victor Schklovsky's concept of 'defamiliarisation' (the need to renew language and style 'to help us recover the sensation of life'),[109] the twentieth century is on the way to supplying itself with new orthodoxies for old - which means that doubtless the taste for mimetic realism and authorial discretion will swing round again. I would wish therefore to avoid the mistake made by Percy Lubbock as he in effect proclaimed the arrival of the ultimate fictional millenium in the Jamesian novel (op. cit.). All the same, it may be illuminating to consider some reasons why the selfconscious novel with its very long history is also a peculiarly appropriate response to its own idiosyncratic age, if not the perpetual future. Before offering this general topography, I would re-emphasize that the point of studying Woolf, Nabokov and Beckett is the beauty, interest and profundity of their actual texts, and I offer my concept of critical selfconsciousness as an essentially subordinate and supportive context to the enjoyment of that beauty, not a master-hypothesis for which they supply the evidence. Thus my individual chapters on the selfconscious authors at work will not be mere exemplifications of the historical and sociological observations I make here, for the divergent character of each writer's imagination means they can accurately exemplify only their own case.

I described at the beginning of this chapter how selfconsciousness attached originally to the emergence of the individual from the protective web of feudal and religious hierarchies, and his assumption of a degree of autonomy and social mobility. In our own cosmopolitan, fragmented and pluralist society, this original breakdown of the unitary world-view has of course reached its logical climax (which is not to say that further climaxes do not lie ahead.) Pluralism allows comparison, comparison produces selfconsciousness. The plurality which affects us most strongly is perhaps that of language. Men in a static society are happy and at ease with their language because it is the only one they know. Men in our own global village, on the other hand, with its unparallelled intensity of information and education, are bombarded from every side not only with literal foreign tongues but also with the diverse dialects of the classes and geographical districts through which they move, and the specialised languages of journalism, politics, advertising, technology and academic discourse of various kinds. In my chapter on Beckett we shall see how vividly the latter author depicts the uncertainty which afflicts ordinary people in their dealings with language, the sense they have of using something borrowed or false. However, for our present purposes it is even more to the point that selfconsciousness in the face of the plural possibilities of speech quickly transmutes itself into self-consciousness in the use of written language, and of course the time for reflection which is a distinguishing condition for the use of written language accentuates this trend. More, written language is readily made the focus of the formal analytic study for which this century is notable. The new academic disciplines, sociology, anthropology, psychology, liguistics, are all self-oriented and introspective in that

they are focussed upon man and his characteristic operations in society. Almost any kind of written text can serve as evidence to almost any discipline, so that it is not only the rise of literary criticism which makes the twentieth-century act of writing particularly selfconscious.

In some ways, however, the selfconscious writer simply shares the selfconsciousness of all contemporary art, which does not emerge from either the scrutiny of the academic specialist or the blunt questions of the layman unscathed. It is troubled by its schizophrenic tendency to be either 'élitist' or vulgarly commercialized, unhappy and inadequate in the face of men's half-unconscious attempt to find in it some kind of surrogate religious experience. It is incapable of dealing satisfactorily with the magnitude of human horror involved in the concentration camps or in man's vastly increased potential for self-destruction, yet it is uneasily aware that to ignore these problems and be entirely playful or anodyne is to retreat from the centre of the human world. On a less lofty but still significant plane, art is an embarrassed part of 'liberal arts' or 'humanities' courses in the institutions of higher education throughout the world, embarrassed both because it has been institutionalised and also because it finds questions from within the institution about its function hard to answer, in a world of pragmatists looking for jobs or at least concrete skills for negotiating the world.[110] This much is true of every kind of art: but there are special reasons at the moment for the self-consciousness of the novel form, which accentuate the endemic self-consciousness we have traced to its origins.

It seems indisputable that the novel is currently what Bradbury

in The Novel Today calls 'the exemplary literary object' (p.10), i.e. the centre of literary-critical attention. Clearly there is a vitally important interaction between the selfconscious novel and novel criticism. I shall end this introduction by considering some specifically oppressive trends in contemporary criticism against which the selfconscious novel represents an assertive (and valuable, in my terms) reaction, but for the present I want to discuss how the sheer weight of critical scrutiny must intensify and qualify the novelist's selfconsciousness. The most invidious effects are exemplified in the quotation from John Barth's 'Life-Story' with which I started this introduction, and the collection of stories which contains it, Lost in the Funhouse. 'Life-Story' depicts an author who is virtually incapable of writing because he is cripplingly aware of the 'conventions of twentieth-century literature' which determine the nature of his work, sickened by writing that is 'self-conscious, vertiginously arch, fashionably solipsistic' - yet revealing his own selfconsciousness with every glib critical term as he analyses his own inability to move beyond this terrible 'regressus in infinitum' (p.117). This kind of paralysis-by-critical-spotlight causes many of the failures in selfconscious writing: the narrative is unable to transcend its own perception of its artificiality, unable to believe in itself enough to move on. It is pointless to dwell upon honourably-motivated failure, but parallel examples include Brigid Brophy's In Transit (1969) where the narrator is '...bombarded to linguistic baldness by invisible fallout (my languages have the falling-out sickness; they have come to a polyglottal stop...' (p.44), and B.S. Johnson's 'Instructions for the Use of Women; or Here, You've Been Done!' ('A suicidal point:make it as unsatisfactory as possible for

the reader in order to convey more nearly the point of unsatisfactoriness.')[111] The essential tension which we noted in Thackeray between vividly real particular and dissociating parenthesis, high drama and ironic commentary, is lost, self-analysis castrates self-expression, and metahistory grimly clamps down upon the necessary dance of story. Moreover, if the balance between critical awareness and pure creative energy is not kept, Brophy's or Barth's kind of demonstration of fluency in the terminology of literary-critical analysis is a honey-pot for feasting critics only, with the less formidably specialised reader left hungry on the outside. This is when a truly incestuous and sterile relationship is set up between critically selfconscious writers and the critics themselves. It is also the point at which anyone who believes that literature must not wilfully narrow its audience will cry stop, we are truly lost in the library, and nothing so popular as a 'Funhouse'. I shall return to the vexed question of the selfconscious novel's potential for academic élitism in my discussion of Nabokov's Look at the Harlequins (1974) in Chapter 3: here I need only say that if selfconscious fiction went further along this road it would automatically lose what I have suggested to be its most important role, which is the opening-out of literature, rather than its obfuscation, an insistence on new truths for reader and writer, rather than the manipulation of moribund critical language for the edification of critics. As we shall later see, the selfconscious novel is quite capable of withstanding the critical flood. We must first consider what reasons, other than the oscillations of literary fashion, have caused contemporary criticism to focus on the novel. This should also throw light upon our self-conscious practitioners, since the wider cultural factors which attract

critics to investigate the novel's internal procedures, and its fraught relationship to the society which contains it, are also factors which help make the contemporary novel particularly prone to selfconsciousness.

The novel is 'exemplary', first of all, partly because as David Lodge points out it has come to stand for the Book, that beleaguered cultural entity,[112] and in a much more uncomfortable sense than the familiar one which Q.D. Leavis records when she translates the frequent request to a librarian, '"Can you recommend me a nice book?"', as a demand for a nice novel.[113] In a post-McLuhan world the Book for some represents a privileged and élitist kind of culture, with an undemocratic assumption of active author and passive reader: it stipulates unfashionably solitary consumption, leisure and the degree of material comfort required to read in peace. Whether or not this stereotype is true (in fact we have seen how energetically the selfconscious novel sets out to undermine the active writer/passive reader hierarchy), it is certainly important that the novel cannot escape from its covers as easily as poetry or drama.

> Poetry and drama, after all, have their roots (and, some would say, their very life) in oral-aural and (in the case of drama) non-verbal modes of communication. (Lodge, loc. cit.)

Even more important than these historical roots are the ways in which poetry and drama, as opposed to fiction, can be communicated to their audience at this present cultural moment: for performance - active participation by the audience in the production of a world of art - and a communal context for response, are currently the two prongs of radical attacks on traditional notions of art. Poetry can be read publicly, by the poet or by any other performer or group of performers:

it can be put on long-playing records, or taped: it can be broadcast, or its performance televised. Drama is obviously the performance art par excellence, and democratic in the sense that amateur groups can as easily attempt an interpretation of the text as the professionals. Drama can be broadcast, filmed, televised. Only the novel is retiring and finds it physically hard to go out. We have noted examples of novels which are filmable and novels which are written with film in mind, but these are still a very small minority. The novel cannot go out, and the public is unwilling to come into the 'Fiction' section of the bookshop. Novelists do not give novel-readings, as poets give poetry-readings (the wonderful days when Dickens riveted his audience and ruined his health by doing just that are long gone.) In short, in an age which has become hyper-aware of the rich variety of media into which messages can be translated, the novel remains virtually untranslatable, and stands or falls with the book. The condition is not a fatal one: clearly it relates back to the novel's original status as a tale without a teller, and I have indicated the range of devices which novels have employed to supply performer-surrogates and performance energy within their written texts. Nevertheless, a real practical problem remains, which is that the energy cannot be released until a reader opens the book - and the current fashion is for creative activity which is very much more open than that. Thus the Novel-Book identification contributes to the selfconscious novelist's sense of unease, and critics whose favourite activity is the premature diagnosis of cultural corpses are attracted to the novel for that reason.

There is another identification which has attracted to the

contemporary novel an especially large number of critical brickbats or bouquets, depending on the temper of the critics, which is that between the novel and humanism. Even a basically liberal and humanist critic like E.M. Forster found some cause for regret when he had to insist, in Aspects of the Novel, that

> The intensely, stiflingly human quality of the novel is not to be avoided; the novel is sogged with humanity...[114]

To put it at its lowest possible denominator, most people like novels because of the people they find in novels. 'His characters are not believable' has long been the lowbrow critic's severest form of rebuke. I have already shown that the selfconscious novelist's characters may not be at all the traditional article by quoting that well-loved character Molly Bloom's radical wish to be 'let...up out' of the whole realistic convention. It may equally be said that while Nabokov and Woolf could be fitted into a humanist tradition without too much trouble, Beckett's 'dispeopled kingdom' could as aptly be said to be 'bicyclist' as 'humanist', in terms of the relative respect he gives to man and machine.[115] And we have already seen how Vonnegut disposes of human personality as a matter of the fluctuating chemistry of the brain. Nevertheless, the subtleties of internal experiment and dissent do not dissuade broader controversialists: 'character' has come to stand as a tenet of faith for some critics and an outdated orthodoxy for others, 'humanism' is even more sensitive territory to be caught on for anyone of the left, and the novel has been caught in the middle of critical crossfire on both counts.

A third feature of the contemporary novel which makes it particularly crisis-ridden, and particularly attractive to crisis-

watchers, is the state of its accounts, the peculiar creakings which have been emerging from the machinery that conveys novel to reader. As Q.D. Leavis' early study of Fiction and the Reading Public pointed out as long ago as 1932, the novel suffers particularly acutely from the kind of cultural schizophrenia I attributed earlier to all art in the twentieth century. The gap between the audience for Harold Robbins and the audience for, say, John Barth is very wide: so is the gap between the earnings of the authors. Leavis describes how in the eighteenth century fiction started off by having a bad name as a rather 'low' form of art, read by women and servants; and in the nineteenth, ' to read novels, as to drink wine, in the morning was far into the century a sign of vice' (p.50). The twentieth century has certainly fulfilled all such highbrow misgivings in the cheap fantasy world of Robbins, Jacqueline Susann, Jacky Collins and the like. The massive sales which the latter breed of authors can achieve (plus the even more enormous amount of money which the film rights of fantasy bring in) is one side of the grotesquely inequitable state of fiction's finances. The topic has been much written-about of late, both in the popular press (on the vexed topic of Public Lending Right) and by academics like Bernard Bergonzi preaching possible disaster. In The Situation of the Novel (1970) he envisages that the delicate balance between the unprofitable majority of novels (including most serious novelists in their number), and the tiny number of novels which strike lucky and make huge profits for both publisher and author, might tip a little further in the direction of an overall loss for the publishing industry, and novels cease forthwith to be a practical proposition (pp.12-13). The Summer 1978 issue of The New Review (Volume 5, Number 1) proves that the

economic future of fiction seems at least as insecure to the actual novelists: its symposium on 'The State of Fiction' includes many voices which state more bitterly and less wittily than David Benedictus that

> It's impossible to regard novel-writing with proper seriousness when simple mathematics indicate that most novelists would earn more per man-hour sewing mail-bags.(p.21)

Auberon Waugh declares straightforwardly that

> No new novelists today can hope to make a living from writing novels, and there is no longer even the prospect of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow...For my own part, I gave up writing new novels six years ago when my fifth and last novel failed to find a publisher in the United States and ended by earning a grand total of £600...(p.71)

Jeremy Brooks is even more direct, not to say desperate, alleging that 'in a very real sense [the economic aspect of novel-writing] has spoilt my life ' (p.29). J.A. Sutherland's recent book-length study of the problem, Fiction and the Fiction Industry (1978),makes it clear that a solidly-documented survey will diagnose crisis just as far-reaching and drastic as the subjective impressions of the authors affected by it suggest.

Two points arise from all this. First and most obviously, those subjective impressions must give the novelists an acute sense of crisis about their work, a heightened sensitivity to the problem of reader-ship, a nagging anxiety about the future of their work and its worth. In other words, the current financial crisis in fiction-marketing is perhaps the strongest single factor in producing selfconsciousness of a negative kind in the novelist (though of course, as we have seen in the case of Vonnegut's witty collages and Spark's cinematic brevity,

it may also drive them to try harder to reach the public.) The second point arising here is that this very crisis of the novel generates yet more books from another part of the publishing industry, to wit the literary critics playing what Lodge calls '...the old guessing game of "Whither the novel?"'[116] It stimulates ever more yards of wordage from the critics as the alternative prognoses are weighed -

> Are we to take 1973 - 6 as a period of transition - what Tebbel calls "a breaking out" - or what might be more aptly called a breaking down, in some more catastrophic sense? (Sutherland p.xxiv)

Such questions will keep critics of the 'cultural studies' kind happily concentrated on the unhappy novel for a long (and lucrative) time to come, probably, as the amount of quotation from other critics on the same topic in Sutherland's book demonstrates. This presents us with a situation which is to say the least ironic. To put it less neutrally, which ultimately do we want to survive, novels or novel criticism? The novelists themselves are likely to feel even less neutral on this question. Malcolm Bradbury is both novelist and critic but his novelist's hat is not very much in evidence when he describes quite calmly, in his introduction to the anthology Contemporary Criticism (1970), what many people (including the present author) would consider to be an outrageous state of affairs: 'Today any devotee of bookshops will know that there is probably more new criticism appearing than new creative writing...'(p.12) What he writes is of course a part of what he describes (as is indeed my thesis in terms of all but its non-appearance in the bookshop.) Later he anatomises in more detail (and more critically)

> a schizophrenia of the cultural community in which the critic has outstripped the creator in professional confidence. This produces the paradox that, when many

> critics are claiming that conditions of literary production are declining and that the age of the book is over, they hardly seem able to share the sense of literary concern. They hardly need to: the audience for criticism is assured; critics but not writers can gain academic tenure; a vast body of texts for study exists; and in a climate of university expansion with large enrolments for literary study, they are in, as we say, a growth-market.(p.20)

Here Malcolm Bradbury is talking about literary criticism as a whole, not novel criticism, but as we have seen he has stated elsewhere (Possibilities,pp. 3-4) that the novel is the chief current focus of critical attention.

The situation is further complicated from the novelists' point of view in that there is no clear-cut opposition between novelist and critic. As the case of Malcolm Bradbury proves, novelists are often professional critics as well, working from within the academic hierarchies Bradbury describes above. And however workman-like and informative the actual production, there is something faintly comic and faintly horrifying about the position of the novelist-critic as critic of novel-criticism, 'Look at me looking at me looking at me': the possibilities for selfconsciousness of every kind in such a situation are all too clear. Nevertheless, the symbiotic relationship between literature and criticism in this century has had some very positive effects for my three central writers. Both Nabokov and Beckett were employed as teachers of university literature courses: Nabokov enjoyed it,[117] Beckett hated it but gained from his Trinity College Dublin years an enormous mass of abstruse knowledge to deploy in his creative work,and an entrée to modernist Paris.[118] Woolf occupied much of her time writing and publishing literary criticism, though this was characteristically the work of an amateur critic (in

the best and loving sense of the adjective) not an academic professional. I shall conclude my introduction to their work by pointing to some disquieting trends in contemporary literary criticism which are very much a part of its professionalised nature and essentially opposed to Woolf's critical practice which so gracefully combined the private passion of the artist with the public awareness of the critic. I shall also show how the selfconscious novelist responds within his work to critical attack.

As a form which was essentially 'novel', an improvisation without formal generic rules or the kinds of constraint that the practicalities of rhyme or metre or stagecraft impose, the novel has always been resistant to generic descriptions of any kind or to formal theory (which is why Henry James and others found such a significant absence of novel-criticism, and had such a hard time filling the gap.)[119] Woolf is typical of all novelists conscious of the novel's own self-propagating formal freedoms and anxious to defend them when she protests against Lubbock's attempt to impose any more rigid notion of novel form from outside: '...whenever Mr. Lubbock talks of form it is as if something were interposed between us and the book as we know it. We feel the presence of an alien substance...'[120] She is essentially at one with Fielding in his own less gentle protestations against the presumptions of any 'little reptile of a critic' (see my p.19)and with Forster in his perception that 'the whole intricate question of method resolves itself not into formulae...'[121] However, in the days of Fielding and even of Forster and Woolf criticism had only a fraction of the professionalism and rigour, the useful but also intimidating capacity to define and

analyse which it has today. Bradbury's remarks about the kind of status and salary which have recently come to the professional critic, while the status of the author has declined, are also to the point: Fielding's 'little reptile of a critic' now looks fat and sleek and much more frightening. The selfconscious novelist however has an ingenious riposte to a situation where he may lack the status or the exact critical language and knowledge of formal conventions to beat the critic at his own game. He can simply make the lateral move of answering the critics from <u>within</u> his own creative text - pre-empting false interpretation, bluntly saying with Beckett 'no symbols where none intended',[122] or like Nabokov laying false trails and lures to fox the over-eager academic hunter, deflating with accurate ridicule the institutional machinery through which the enemy operates (see my Chapter 4). As long as he speaks <u>within</u> his text, the novelist cannot be refuted outside it - according to the New Critics' own dictum that the text will be judged in its own terms.

It seems absolutely fair that when novel-critics are taking the novelists' fictions and subsuming them to larger and often clumsier fictions of their own,[123] the novelists should counter by cunningly taking these critical fictions and turning them into mere counters in a much more important game, the novel's. Thus Muriel Spark's <u>The Comforters</u> (1957), a work which deliberately violates realistic illusion at every step and is filled with teasing references to narrative convention, has a heroine who is simultaneously writing a novel (which turns out to be <u>The Comforters</u>) and a 'work on the twentieth-century novel ...<u>Form in the Modern Novel</u> '. Asked how it is going, Caroline replies '"Not bad. I'm having difficulty with

the chapter on realism."' (p.59) Nabokov in similar vein breaks into the magical description in Ada (1969) of Van's 'greatest performance' at walking on his hands with the following parody of critical ploddery:

> Questions for study and discussion:
> 1. Did both palms leave the gound when Van, while reversed, seemed actually to 'skip' on his hands?
> 2. Was Van's adult incapacity to 'shrug' things off easily physical or did it 'correspond' to some archetypal character of his 'undersoul'?...[124]

Nabokov's most brilliant attack on academic orthodoxy is perhaps Pale Fire (1962), the novel cast in the form of a poem with an appended critical commentary by a Professor Charles Kinbote.[125] The commentary's extreme length in comparison with the poem is the first wry comment on the current creative-critical balance. Even better is the way in which the commentary slowly turns into something insanely and lyrically like fiction, so that the intensely creative madness of Kinbote implicitly reminds us of the arid regularities of other, formally similar, critical exegeses.[126]

The selfconscious tradition's defiance of critical authority was established as early as the days when Sterne ironically apostrophised the reviewers of his breeches and Fielding made the plain and resonant statement of artistic independence which we have already quoted in part:

> ...I shall not look on myself as accountable to any court of critical jurisdiction whatever: for I am, in reality, the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein. And these laws, my readers, whom I consider as my subjects, are bound to believe in and obey...Nor do I doubt...they will unanimously concur in supporting my dignity, and in rendering me all the honour I shall deserve or desire. (Tom Jones, pp.88-89)

The 'readers' Fielding is cautioning are clearly those who have

pretensions to joining the 'court of critical jurisdiction'. But this 'court' has in the twentieth century become a much more impressive entity, 'laws' seem much more the province of the critic than the novelist, and the 'dignity' and 'honour' of the author have come under especial threat of late, owing to the specific trends within criticism described thus by Malcolm Bradbury in Possibilities:

> ...today we like...large-scale explanatory structures... Recent criticism of fiction has given us a number of very striking stories about the coming of the novel, and its going - normally interfusions of formalism and historicism. Some of them are obvious evasions of their subject - if the novel is their subject. For once you start to regard the novel as a distillation of broader structures in society - myths and typologies, perceptual and liguistic crises, and the like - you are liable to think of the novelist as a man with only a limited degree of self-signature...(p.18) [my itals.]

I italicise the last part of this quotation because this of course is precisely what the selfconscious novel is about, the author insisting that he has authored his own work, that it is his structure stamped on the artefact, his signature which has 'left a stain upon the silence', as Beckett said.[127] The selfconscious author, placing a very high value upon self-signature, is therefore especially likely to come into conflict with the holistic critics Bradbury describes. Lacking certainties in its collective psychic life, an irreligious and morally sceptical age is perhaps the more susceptible to the attraction of other types of totalising approach to life, whether political or intellectual - some kind of return from our extreme of fragmentation to metaphorical equivalents of feudal order. It is obviously undesirable to reject the usefulness of holistic approaches, whether marxist-historicist or structuralist: such a rejection can too easily lead in the direction of the New Critical concept of the autotelic individual art-work purified of authorial intention or

obligations to its audience, the ice-crystal on the ether - and we have seen that this latter critical notion was equally unfriendly to the author who chooses to appear in his work and overtly indicate his intentions on a less-than-ethereal world. Literature does have a context and an audience, and affinities to other works, and holistic approaches can help us to appreciate both the affinities and, if rightly used, the differences and the special cases. Nevertheless, it is time for selfconscious authors and their advocates to take a hard look at their rights when a critic as prestigious as Roland Barthes writes an article called 'The Death of the Author' (1968), not merely recording 'the extinction of the author' as Friedman prematurely did, but polemically calling for an execution. Barthes is an enormously diverse, creative and contradictory figure who writes often for rhetorical effect, but since his statements all tend to be so influential there is some justification for pinning this anti-author strand in his work down to the page and examining it, even if Barthes himself has a much subtler understanding of the author and much more sympathy for him, than his rhetoric sometimes suggests.[128]

In S/Z (1970) he enjoins

> the Author himself - that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism... to avoid making his person the subject, the impulse, the origin, the authority, the Father, whence his work would proceed...[129]

Though not intended as such, this sounds very much like a direct attack on the central practice of the selfconscious writer since Sterne - except that hitherto I have cast the selfconscious writer himself in the role of radical. Barthes' injunction sounds liberating enough on the face of it, but only if one accepts a schema where the author is an authoritarian patriarch and the readers are oppressed

serfs, now belatedly being urged to overthrow authority and replace it with their own free and creative notions of the text. In the first place, of course, the selfconscious author usually aims at a cooperative relationship with his reader, as I have shown. But in any case, the truth of our current literary situation is that to reject authorial direction as a significant factor in interpreting a text is to replace tyranny with tyranny, for it is not the naive and rebellious reader whose responses will fill the gap, it is the highly professional metatext of the critic - who is probably a much more efficient authoritarian bogey, and much more of a logical imperialist.

There is and there ought to be something alarming about an introductory fanfare like Robert Scholes' in Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction (New Haven & London, 1974) to the effect that he will

> consider some attempts to systematise the whole order of fiction, especially through the consideration of fictional modes and genres. These attempts, admittedly imperfect, are nonetheless tantalisingly close to being satisfactory... (p.60)

The size of the claim is alarming despite Scholes' own modest caveats that such typologies are 'merely tools to be used', alarming because of a cultural context of academic institutions which might find a system of scientific categories more easily teachable and examinable than that idiosyncratic thing, the text which goes to build the category - let alone the author who builds the text. Jonathan Culler in Structuralist Poetics (1975) is in any case much less equivocal than Scholes about the aims of structuralism:

> ...structuralism effects an important reversal of perspective, granting precedence to the task of formulating a comprehensive

> theory of literary discourse and assigning a secondary place to the interpretation of individual texts...(p.118)
>
> ...a structuralist poetics would claim that the study of literature involves only indirectly the critical act of placing a work in a situation, reading it as a gesture of a particular kind, and thus giving it a meaning.(p.119)

The question is, to what end do we formulate a 'comprehensive theory of literary discourse', if not as Northrop Frye more sympathetically suggests in order to supply a context which will indeed help us to read the individual work 'as a gesture of a particular kind'?[130] There are clear justifications for the establishment of comprehensive formulae of analysis in the physical sciences, for the simple reason that if we know the chemical formula for a reaction, we can reproduce it: if we understand the physical dynamics of a lever or pulley, we can make one of our own. The same thing will never be true of literary analysis, whether historical or linguistic: however 'comprehensive' our 'theory', it will not enable us to write a master-work. If literary studies are ever reduced further in the direction of a science of literature, with its own forest of technical terms (cf. the hideously academic names which Barthes gave in S/Z to the five cumbersome codes he erected from his analysis of a single gracefully-named text, Balzac's Sarrasine),[131] the only certainty is that many more less trained and privileged readers will get lost in the trees, quite the reverse of the essentially democratic claims Barthes makes for his critical procedures. The selfconscious author is in fact often very much aware of his allegiences to the ordinary reader, and alive to the intimidating claims of 'seriousness' which the institutions of literary criticism make. One way in which the selfconscious author reacts is by deliberate playfulness and anarchy, rejection of high symbol and high seriousness, Vonnegut's jokes and

childishly innocent drawings of 'WIDE-OPEN BEAVERS INSIDE!'[132] But the play has its own serious intent, to thwart institutional solmenity of all sorts, tickle the corpulent grandeur of critical generalisations, defeat false critical fictions with more entertaining and less pompous ones.

Structuralism seems fraught with dangers when applied to literary texts simply because, as a methodology which in its origins (De Saussure and Jakobson on language, Propp on the folk-tale, Levi-Strauss on primitive culture)[133] sought to unearth significant form in fields whose organisation previously seemed arbitrary, it is by its very nature ill-adapted to objects of study which already possess a manifest controlling design, i.e. the author's - even without an explicit declaration of intent to dethrone that author. The danger of eliding the approaches to two very different kinds of material is clear from a statement of Barthes' to the effect that the analyst of plot

> ...finds himself in more or less the same situation as Saussure confronted by the heterogeneity of language... and seeking to extract a principle of classification... from...apparent confusion...[134]

But plot is in fact language organised into narrative, already one significant level of order above 'apparent confusion'. Again, when Barthes says that the validity of a mode of criticism

> ...lies not in the ability to discover the work under consideration but, on the contrary, to cover it as completely as possible with one's own language...[135]

it is tempting to notice ominous implications in the choice of imagery, and see the jargons and patterns of criticism in all their well-paid and published comfort finally covering over that slim and precarious thing which once gave them birth, the creative text.

Dethrone the deity, bury the text...the eradication of individual landmarks and contours doubtless makes the erection of smooth categories easier.

What seems to lie behind the anti-author strand in structuralist literary criticism is a mistaken identification of the individual author firstly with the sometimes dull and rigid academic orthodixies which have insisted on deference for him, and secondly with all the crimes currently accredited to individualism. To take the first point first, the rebellion against academic literary critics is all very well but it is quite unfair to assume that the author is aligned with them, especially when for centuries author and critic have fought and parried, parried and fought - and with special fierceness, as we have seen, in selfconscious fiction. On the second charge of individualism, however, selfconscious authors are vulnerable as in some senses the most blatantly individualistic of authors. Literature as a whole is individualistic by comparison with oral tradition insofar as it allows the individually premeditated and ultimately signed text. The novel is perhaps the most individualistic kind of literature, with its appeal to personal experience and its idiosyncratic freedom of form, and the selfconscious novel, which tends to remind us with insistent force of the individual author ordering the words we are reading, distils and concentrates the endemic individualism of novels and of literature. Nevertheless, Barthes' miscasting of the individual author as reactionary villain in 'The Death of the Author' seems to be based on a selective reading of history, and a narrowly political sense of what constitutes rebellion.

The radical orthodoxy that individualism in the twentieth century is a reactionary force is so powerful that the originally subversive effects of the rise of the individual from the regimented communality of feudalism are too easily forgotten. There are good reasons why economic individualism has currently got itself a bad name, yet Marx's own description of the rise of bourgeois individualism in the Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848) insists that

> The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part...wherever it has got the upper hand, [it] has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors'...It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy waters of egotistical calculation...for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation...stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe...torn away from the family its sentimental veil...[136]

Clearly 'egotistical calculation' and 'brutal exploitation' are not desirable ends, but Marx points to the genuinely revolutionary effect of economic individualism's defictionalising manoeuvres, its clear-eyed dissolution of the covertly oppressive veils of sentiment and of 'religious and political illusions' which have served to keep men thinking that the social order is absolute, and that their 'superiors' are 'naturally' constituted as such. Stripped of its economic elements,[137] Marx's analysis of the operations of individualism on feudalism is very close to the kind of radical de-fictionalising procedures that the selfconscious author seeks to perform. Since it is from these historical origins that the selfconscious novel sprang, as we have seen, it seems logical to assert that in their attacks on commonly-accepted fictions (including those of literary criticism) the

twentieth-century selfconscious novelists are continuing a very old tradition of individualism as opposition.

To criticise or oppose is in essence the act of an individual insofar as it involves individuating oneself from the mass of received opinion: yet that act of self-isolation may well be carried out on others' behalf, and the next step must be to communicate the oppositional stance to others and interact with them. In just such a way, the individual, self-declaring author in selfconscious fiction becomes in Trotsky's term 'super-personal'[138] when he attempts to explore and expose universal clichés of order and represent his reader in understanding the world. Contrary to Barthes' diatribe against the individual author, which he engages supposedly in the interests of the oppressed reader, the selfconscious author asserts the reality of that reader along with his own, and asks him (as independent judge rather than passive dupe) to assent to the alternative world the author constructs for him. John Fowles in The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) frees his reader to choose between two alternative endings: John Barth actually frees him to stop reading:-

> How is it you don't go to a movie, watch TV, stare at a wall, play tennis with a friend, make amorous advances to the person who comes into your mind when I speak of amorous advances?[139]

- not an entirely constructive ploy, one might say, but hardly an oppressive one. B.S. Johnson tells his reader '...I have conveniently left enough obscure or even unknown for you to suggest your own beginning; and your own middle, as well, if you reject mine.'[140] The selfconscious author in short is often at pains to completely disrupt and invert the authoritative and potentially authoriatarian tone

adopted towards the reader by most of the written texts of our culture. He is on the reader's side against the world.

Lionel Trilling has some highly apposite comments to contribute towards my characterisation of the individual author as The Opposing Self (the title of a book he wrote in 1955, but a recurrent and powerful theme of his critical writing.[141]) Despite his distrust of formalism, which we have already noted, he is far from advocating any simple or positive kind of realism, and in his formulations of the purpose of literature he offers something which seems particularly appropriate to my own authors:

> The function of literature...has been to make us aware of the particularity of selves, and the high authority of the self in its quarrel with its society and its culture. Literature is in that sense subversive.[142]

Later he describes this selfhood as 'characterised by its intense and adverse imagination of the culture in which it ha[s] its being'.[143] Trilling bases his notions of subversiveness not on Marx but on Freud, the twentieth century's other founding father, and he draws interesting parallels between Freud's conception of the problematic relationship between self and society, and the circumstances of Freud's own upbringing as a Jew in antisemitic Vienna. Once again we are reminded of the biographical facts behind my three main authors' status as outsiders in their culture, and the Lukácsian attribute of 'homelessness', which seems likely to make the alienated intellectual more ready to throw stones (perhaps with messages wrapped around them) at the comfortable houses which surround him.

I said that Barthes' miscasting of the individual author as reactionary was based on a narrow reading of the function of individualism

and a narrowly political view of what constitutes rebellion. Men are not only political animals, and oppression is not purely political. The selfconscious author often operates in a liberating fashion in areas which are not as generally defined political. Men are oppressed in the first instance by their biology (because their bodies will decay and cease even if their minds can master the cosmos.) Modern men are oppressed also by their technology (the poisonous weight which advanced industrial society has laid over the surface of the world, which determines how men work and where it is safe for them to walk, and may determine the way in which they suddenly die.) A rebellion against biology must necessarily be indirect, pace the pious hopes expressed by Trotsky at the end of Literature and Revolution that post-revolutionary man will also master his 'purely physiologic life' through will and reason.[144] Malone in Beckett's Malone Dies (1951) rebels against the slow death of his body by formulating fictions to survive him with frantic energy, finishing the book at the moment of his death and the moment of his victory, since his story is saved from the chaos of the unwritten. Albert Camus in The Rebel (published in the same year, 1951) has a similar vision of 'Rebellion and Art' and in particular of the practice of Proust, the twentieth century's first great selfconscious novelist:-

> Proust's work...appears to be one of the most ambitious and most significant of man's enterprises against his mortal condition. He has demonstrated that the art of the novel can reconstruct creation itself...this art... is allied to the beauty of the world or its inhabitants against the powers of death and oblivion.[145] It is in this way that his rebellion is creative.

The selfconscious novelists exploring at length the nature of the creative act and demonstrating its dynamic energy, strike against the slow encroachments of entropy, the physical destructiveness of time.

The artist who later in the century has tried as Proust once did to 'reconstruct creation' can also engage in creative rebellion against the recent creation of a world of self-generating technology. Within the freedom of his literary artifices he can indicate the sterile weight of technological artifice which threatens to make man into one minor function of a giant machine. As my last chapter will discuss at length, twentieth-century selfconscious fiction has been particularly aware of the universal penetration of the synthetic into human life, and the sophistication which these technological fictions have achieved. At one level my authors tend quite simply to alert us to the absurdity of the world of the supermarket and the advertising dream, as Vonnegut does, exposing the artifice and implicitly asking us if we really want or need it. At a more profound level, the selfconscious author who in the face of mass society is unafraid of asserting his own individuality and its potency to dream and to create, closely fits the model envisaged by Herbert Marcuse in Negations: Essays in Critical Theory (1968):-

> In totalitarian technological society, freedom remains thinkable only as autonomy over the entirety of the apparatus. This includes the freedom to reduce it or to reconstruct it in entirety...[146]

Imaginative autonomy is in itself a vital first step, as Marcuse's work consistently asserts: applauding signs of a 'new sensibility' in An Essay on Liberation (1969), he quotes the slogan '"l'imagination au pouvoir"' from the évènements of 1968.[147] What is even more important however is that the production of literature can be truly the act of unaccomodated man, pre-technological man, man who needs only brain and hand to assert his control over the world around him. Society can stop a man publishing by witholding the technology of printing and selling, but it cannot stop him writing. Thus Nabokov's Cincinnatus C.

in Invitation to a Beheading (1935), imprisoned and condemned to death by a state which is composed of bullying clichés of thought and a vicious hatred of privacy, defies it by writing his private journal in the death cell, and finally dissolves that nightmare 'reality' altogether by refusing to grant it the respect of belief. As the same author's Bend Sinister (1947) conceded, in real life totalitarian states cannot so easily be dismissed and dissolved when they threaten the individuality of the subject: and in our daily lives, the 'entirety of the apparatus' of the state and of consumer society may be so overwhelmingly material and all-pervasive that the individual will is dwarfed and stunned. Yet Invitation to a Beheading has metaphorical truth on its side, for it reminds us that men have had no need of machines or authorised instruments of power for some of their most impressive and powerful acts of creation. It also shows in crystal-clear parable what much selfconscious fiction suggests indirectly, that one of the best weapons for coping with the intimidating 'apparatus' of present-day society is to refuse to see it as 'natural' or 'normal'. We are freed from some part of our fear of any organisation or any state once we can point to the absurdity of its pretences. This is the least sentimental interpretation of the slogan 'l'imagination au pouvoir', which in this sense is a valid assertion of the revolutionary effect of the individualistic imagination. When structuralism in effect ejects the author from control over his text and says that 'the signs [of fiction] must be completed, reordered, brought into the realm of experience by the reader' (Culler p.264), it denies this active and rebellious intention and virtually castrates the author who thinks he has already evolved a text which can function as a lucid act of defiance. It would be well if structuralists and other holistic critics remembered

Marcuse's warning against 'the sacrifice of the individual to the service of false collectives' (Negations,p.141). Since these collectives have previously included the feudal order, religion, family and national pride, and the certain march of imperialism, fashionable literary critics might not be entirely eager to join the list by demanding the sacrificial death of the individual author.

I am aware that my own attempts in this introduction to create some overall genealogy and geography for the rather amorphous concept of selfconsciousness may have led me into somewhat parallel errors of holistic description. But I have already suggested that the erection of norms is most useful in order to determine degrees and kinds of deviation from them. It may be appropriate to conclude with an example of the benefits which may be derived from sceptical readings of generalised cultural accounts, in the hope that a sceptical reading of mine will offer similar benefits. Having begun this tour with reflections based on the suggestive formulations of Lukács, I end it with some which spring from his disciple Lucien Goldmann's continuation of his work. In Towards a Sociology of the Novel (1964)[148] Goldmann agrees on a basically Lukácsian account of the novel's beginnings in 'the story of a degraded search...for authentic values, by a problematic hero, in a degraded world.' (p.3) Illustrating to perfection Bradbury's model of the kind of critic who likes 'to regard the novel as a distillation of broader myths in society' (Possibilities, p.18), he explains that

> The novel form seems to me...the transposition on the literary plane of everyday life in the individualistic society created by market production. (p.7)

He goes on to say that though the novel rose with the rise of capitalism

and the rise of the individual, individualism could not long retain its privileged status in a social system which was dominated by the 'exchange value' of the market-place. The individual hero of the novel became 'problematic' because of

> ...the internal contradictions between individualism as a universal value produced by bourgeois society and the important and painful limitations that this society itself brought to the possibilities of the development of the individual...
>
> [W]hen...individualism...has gradually been eliminated by the transformation of the economic life and the replacement of the economy of free competition by an economy of cartels and monopolies (a transformation that began at the end of the nineteenth century, but whose qualitative turning-point most economists would place between 1900 and 1910), we witness a parallel transformation of the novel form that culminates in the gradual dissolution and disappearance of...the hero...(p.12)

Goldmann specifically links this dissolution of self to the radical uncertainties and plural perspectives of Kafka, Musil, Joyce, a diagnosis not peculiar to his own historical account, though he expounds his view of history forcefully and well. What is far more striking (and germane to our purpose) is his subsequent diagnosis of more recent developments in fiction as the manifestation in art of the next historical development of capitalism, from the dissolving to the disappearing individual. Making the (highly selective) choice of the nouveau roman, and Alain Robbe-Grillet among the nouveau-romanciers, to represent most recent developments in the novel, he interprets Robbe-Grillet's attempts to decontaminate his fictional worlds from anthropomorphic metaphor (or indeed human 'characters') as a direct representation of the final state of reification in a commodity-oriented capitalist society, where everything human is subordinate to a fetishised world of objects (Sociology Chapter 3, 'The Nouveau Roman and Reality', pp.132-149.) The analogy is attractively neat:

but Robbe-Grillet's own critical writing, speaking as a mere individualistic intellectual,suggest he is being much more intelligently subversive.[149] In fact he has an aesthetic quarrel with the lazy 'humanising' of the world and is concerned to render it astonishing again by stripping it of descriptive cliché and the 'myths of "depth"', thus allowing the impact of sheer material existence to reinvigorate his pages. This is something much more interesting than in Goldmann's account where Robbe-Grillet is faithfully transcribing the material results of an economic malady in the world around him.

Whether or not Robbe-Grillet can properly be used to illustrate Goldmann's description of the erosion of the individual in contemporary society, that erosion is not in much doubt. I would suggest however that its effects can more accurately and significantly be traced in the holistic and dehumanising procedures of critics than the fictional worlds of authors, and Goldmann himself is one of the pre-eminent sinners as he happily evicts the highly selfconscious Robbe-Grillet from his own authored text.[150] If instead of imposing a partial reading upon the French nouveau roman Goldmann had looked more widely at the contemporary flowering of the selfconscious novel, it might have occurred to him that what we are in fact witnessing is a rebellion of the individual against dehumanising trends in mass society, the fetishisation of objects and the kinds of totalising intellectual theory that mass societies with their desire for mass education produce. In the preceding Jamesian novel, the individuality of the author (though not his character) may in a real sense have been said to dissolve and disappear: but in the contemporary self-

conscious novel he is articulately and defiantly there, and one of his first objects in being there is to disrupt such over-confident reductions of the kaleidoscopic world of aesthetics to static monotones. The author only has to playfully shake the glass for quite another pattern to appear: and the novelist, not the critic, is ultimately the master of pattern-making, though the critic makes his own clumsier attempts. I am aware with B.S. Johnson that 'even in this introduction I am trying to make patterns, to impose patterns on the chaos.'[151] The potential for chaos, however, exists only in the critical macrocosm of causation and connection in which I have chosen to place the individual texts, and not in those texts whose carefully created order I shall now examine.

As Virginia Woolf, the subject of my first detailed study, remarked (à propos of the overly schematic Lubbock, but it might well also apply to Goldmann - or even me):

> ...in these circumstances it is best to shake oneself free from images and start afresh with a definite subject to work upon...[152]

NOTES

1. Op. cit. (New York 1966), p.4.

2. Modernism 1890-1930, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (1976), pp. 394-415 (p. 394).

3. Op.cit., p. 85.

4. In Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930), passim.

5. 1975 Panther edition, pp. 179-206, etc. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

6. 'The Circular Ruins' is collected in Borges, Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York, 1964): 1970 Penguin edition, pp. 72-77. 'The Gospel According to Saint Mark' is collected in Borges, Doctor Brodie's Report (New York, 1972): 1974 edition, pp. 15-22.

7. Collected in Labyrinths, pp. 62-71 and pp. 282-283.

8. Ivory Towers and Sacred Fonts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce (New York, 1964).

9. Gabriel Josipovici writes interestingly about the relationship of the individual writer to tradition in The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction (1971), p. 291.

10. Op. cit., p. 8.

11. See e.g. the title of Ficciones 1935-1944 (Buenos Aires, 1944).

12. Quoted in André Maurois' Preface to Labyrinths, p.13.

13. See e.g. No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1966 (1967), Contents page.

14. Stevick, 'Schehezerade Runs Out of Plots, Goes On Talking ...', in The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction (1977), edited by Bradbury, pp. 186-216 (p.206).

15. 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', collected in Illuminations, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York, 1968): 1973 Fontana edition, pp. 83-109 (Section VIII, p.91).

16. In Woolf, Collected Essays, edited by Leonard Woolf, 4 vols (1966-1969), Vol. II (1967). pp. 218-229. First published as 'Poetry Fiction and the Future', in 2 parts, New York Herald Tribune (14 August 1927 and 21 August 1927).

17. The Gift was first published serially in Paris minus the fourth chapter, and complete in New York, 1952. Lolita was first published in Paris, Pale Fire in New York and London.

18. See Appel, Nabokov's Dark Cinema (New York, 1947), passim.

19. In The Situation of the Novel (1970), Chapter 1, 'The Novel No Longer Novel', pp. 11-34, esp. pp. 12-13. On p.13 Bergonzi states that 'critics have for a long time been predicting the end of the novel, and then cites Lionel Trilling, Ortega Y. Gasset, Alberto Moravia and George Steiner in support (pp. 13-15).

20. See Bradbury, The Social Context of Modern English Literature (Oxford 1971) pp. 120-121, 125-128 and pp. 136-137. Bradbury is actually concerned more generally with the situation of all serious writers but his remarks have special relevance for the novel: ' as writing has more and more found its professional centre in large, institutional and often commercially-oriented activities, the preservation of a context for independent creation has become harder, and very much more difficult to finance.' (p.130)

21. See 'Waiting for the End: Current Novel Criticism', in The Novelist at the Crossroads, and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism (1971), Chapter 2, pp. 37-54. Lodge refuses to 'deliver another sermon on the text Is the novel dying?' (p.38) but nevertheless suggests that the current glut of novel criticism may not so much constitute evidence of the novel's vitality as of its need for intellectual champions: 'if we are to believe the McLuhanite prophets, literature in the forms most familiar to us faces obsolescence, as we move from a print-oriented culture to an electronically-revived oral-aural culture - a situation in which the novel, historically the product of the printing press, is clearly the most vulnerable of the literary genres.' (p. 37)

22. Sutherland, Fiction and the Fiction Industry (1978), passim.

23. Laughter in the Dark was published in Paris, Despair in Berlin. The constant allusions to cinema in the narrative technique of Laughter in the Dark and in the characters' preoccupations make its eventual translation into cinema pleasingly symmetrical.

24. Which may have helped resign Ms. Spark to the title of the filmed version of The Abbess of Crewe, Dirty Habits.

25. Slapstick, 1977 Panther edition, p. 176. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

26. 1st Series, 1919-1921, edited by Louis Aragon, André Breton, Philippe Soupault. 2nd Series, 1922-1924, edited by André Breton. The 1st Series was in fact Dadaist, but the 2nd Series under Breton's direction showed the spirit of his 1924 Surrealist Manifesto.

27. This process actually got under way in Europe in the 13th-century prose romances. For an interesting political interpretation of the rise of prose as a side-effect of the rise of the middle classes see Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel (1951), 2 vols: Vol.I, Part I,Chapter 2, 'Realism and Romance'. 1962 Grey Arrow edition, pp. 28-42.

28. Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit (1578): Euphues and His England (1580). The Unfortunate Traveller: or, The Life of Jack Wilton. Perhaps the most famous English 16th-century example of literary prose is Philip Sidney's Arcadia (1590).

29. 1966 Penguin edition, edited by R.P.C. Mutter, p. 199. All subsequent references are to this edition.

30. As we shall see it did not receive substantial critical attention until well into this century. See e.g. Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Fiction', in Collected Essays Vol. II, pp. 51-55: 'There is not a critic alive now [1927] who will say that the novel is a work of art and that as such he will judge it.' However, Henry James (who died in 1916) did more than anyone else to insist on critical esteem for the novel in the series of Prefaces he wrote to the re-edition of his works (1907-1909) collected together in The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James, edited by R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1934).

31. The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature, Berlin 1920: 1971 edition, translated by Anna Bostock, p. 80. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

32. Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge, translated by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (1936). First published Bonn, 1929.

There is of course a difficulty in deciding when exactly this 'modern era' was ushered in, and all accounts as brief as mine must run the risk of sounding much too clearcut in their encapsulations of great and diffuse movements of historical change, which of their very nature proceed differently in different countries and cultures. In my own account of the birth of selfconsciousness I have joined Lukács, Mannheim and many others in postulating some decisive and significant changes in European consciousness at the end of the middle ages, and have tied the beginnings of individualism and the literary mode of individualism, the novel, to that era. However changes in consciousness can be dated with much less precision than literary modes. I am indebted to Beverly Hayne, editor of Psychology Today (British edition) 1976- 1977 , who read this manuscript after completion and commented perceptively on the difficulty of attributing clear or single historical and geographical locations to the emergence of supposedly 'new' phenomena in human consciousness. In particular she drew my attention to the work of Princeton psychologist Julian Jaynes who traced the origins of human consciousness, a somewhat broader phenomenon than my 'selfconsciousness' but evidently linked to it, back to 1,000 B.C. (Jaynes, The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind, Boston, Mass., 1977). In his account ancient man lacked any concept of individual ambition, individual sin or individual lifespan and substituted for our own conscious decisions a passive acceptance of the voices of the gods who ruled and possessed all men alike. This curious ability of all ancient men to hear - in one chamber of what Jaynes calls the 'bicameral mind' - the voices of the gods, helped preserve social hierarchies and social unity. Jaynes is clearly dealing with a more massive process of evolution in which my own field of study represents only one chapter, but nevertheless it is interesting to note the very similar way in which he writes about the changes in human society which eventually produced conscious man and deafened him to the voice of absolute authority. Asked to outline these factors in an interview with Sam Keen, he summarised as follows: '...Catastrophes, too much chaos and novelty ... [Volcanic eruptions and tidal waves] started a series of migrations and a huge game of musical chairs, with peoples all around the Near East intermeshing ... Ripped out of the context

in the larger hierarchical group where neither habit nor the bi-cameral voice could support him, the refugee was forced into consciousness' (Julian Jaynes in conversation with Sam Keen, 'The Lost Voices of the Gods: Reflections on the Dawn of Consciousness', Psychology Today (New York), edited by Jack Nessel, Vol. XI, 6 (November 1977), pp. 58-144 (p. 138)). There are clear analogies here to my writers (see my p.23) and to Lukács' thesis that philosophy itself is the product of the 'transcendental homelessness' of the modern age (my p.22). One may therefore suggest that while it is impossible to be too definite about the chronology of specific emergences, there seems to be considerable agreement about the basic direction of movement in human consciousness. (But it is interesting to note finally that Jaynes in the same interview notes certain tendencies in contemporary culture which return man in the direction of a corporate identity - '... modern people have political ideology and uncritical allegiance to nationalistic leaders instead of gods. The voices of the gods are only disguised, they are not gone' (p. 144). For similar remarks about the re-emergence of absolute fictions, technological and political, see my Chapter 5 passim.

33. 1957. 1963 Penguin edition, Chapter 1, 'Realism and the Novel Form', pp. 9-35 passim.

34. Sociologie de la littérature (Paris 1958), translated by Ernest Pick: Introduction by Malcolm Bradbury and Bryan Wilson, p.14.

35. Loc. cit.

36. 'Of Ideas in General, and their Original', op. cit., Book II, Chapter 1, Section 3. Collected in The Age of Enlightenment: The Eighteenth Century Philosophers, edited by Isaiah Berlin (Mentor Books, New York, Toronto and London, 1956), p. 41.

37. The Adventures of Don Quixote, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra: 1950 Penguin edition, translated by J. M. Cohen, Part I, Chapter 8, p. 74.

38. Chapter 9, p. 77.

39. Part I, Chapter 14 - Chapter 15, p. 111.

40. Partial Magic, Chapter 1, pp. 1-29. Borges invents his own brilliant variation upon the Cervantian theme in his well-known story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' (Labryinths, pp. 62-71). See also his essay 'Partial Magic' (op.cit., pp. 228-231) from which Alter's title is presumably derived. It is interesting to note that William Thackeray, for whose importance as a selfconscious predecessor I shall argue later in this chapter, produced a version of Don Quixote retold in simple English for the Shanghai Book Company of Hong Kong (British Museum copy of this work is only dated in Chinese script.) Nabokov however referred to the Quixote as 'a cruel and crude old book' (Strong Opinions, New York 1973, p. 103.)

41. Op.cit., pp. 873-874.

42. A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, Part I, Section 18. Collected in Age of Enlightenment, p. 137.

43. Third Dialogue, collected op, cit., p.154.

44. See e.g. Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy: and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day (1946), Chapter 20. 1961 edition, pp. 675-690. See also The Age of Ideology: The Nineteenth Century Philosophers (Mentor Books, New York, Toronto and London, 1956), edited by Henry D. Aiken, pp. 33-34.

45. Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), 1971 Oxford edition, translated by William Wallace, Introduction by J. N. Findlay: Paragraph 417, p. 157.

46. Age of Ideology, p. 23.

47. Op.cit., Section 1. Collected in Age of Ideology, pp. 61-64.

48. Op.cit., p. 54.

49. Op.cit., p. 58.

50. Op.cit., Chapter 1, 'Prejudices of Philosophers'. Collected in Age of Ideology, pp. 212-224 (p.215).

51. See Raymond Willimas, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1976), pp. 111-113.

52. See James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, 1719 (2 vols). 1960 Everyman edition, edited and introduced by S. C. Roberts, Vol.I. p. 292.

53. In No! In Thunder: Essays on Myth and Literature (1963), Introduction, pp. 1-18 (p.8) 'Unless he bites the hand that feeds him, the artist cannot live; and this those who would prefer him dead (so they can erect statues of him) can never understand.'

54. Steiner, in Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture (1971). 1974 Faber Papercovered edition, pp. 29-48.

55. Nabokov, Strong Opinions, p. 154.

56. 1963 Introduction to 1972 edition of Bend Sinister, p.vii. First published New York, 1947.

57. Strong Opinions, p. 179.

58. Strong Opinions, p. 193.

59. Op.cit., p. 13.

60. See e.g. Fay Weldon's Female Friends (1975) or Little Sisters (1978) and Angela Carter's Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces (1974) especially 'Flesh and the Mirror' (pp. 61-70), or The Passion of the New Eve (1977). Carter's non-fiction book on the relationship between Sade's works and cultural stereotypes of the female, The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History (1979), offers more detailed analysis of the same ground.

61. See e.g. Vous les entendez? (Paris, 1972), translated by Maria Jolas as Do You Hear Them? (1975).

62. Inside Mr. Enderby (1963, first published under pseudonym 'Joseph Kell'), Enderby Outside (1968) and The Clockwork Testament, or Enderby's End (1974).

63. Trilling's is one of the favourable 'Critics' Opinions' anthologised in the Appendix to Lolita, p. 311-319 (pp. 314-315). It is interesting to note that there he specifically picks out for praise Lolita's 'curious moral mobility', 'its ambiguity of tone and its ambiguity of intention'.

64. In The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society, 1951 edition, pp. 205-222 (p. 219).

65. pp. 212 and 221.

66. Op. cit., p. 275.

67. In 'The Ideology of Modernism', op.cit., translated by John and Necke Mander. Collected in Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader, edited by David Lodge (1972), pp. 475-484 (p. 475).

68. Op.cit., pp. 23-31 (p. 27).

69. pp. 474-475, p. 484 etc.

70. This is implicit in his recurrent criticism that modernist literature concentrates on the ills of capitalist society, the teminus a quo, but fails to deal constructively with a better future, the terminus ad quem (see e.g. p. 487).

71. See F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment (1933), especially pp. 93-98, 'The Loss of the Organic Community'.

72. I in no sense mean to underrate the rich and varied cultural achievements of those years by reviving the hackneyed concept of the 'Dark Ages', but am using the notion of darkness metaphorically and in the context of selfconsciousness only.

73. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (1932): 1965 re-issue, p. 147 and pp. 149-150.

74. New York. 1970 Panther edition, p. 17.

75. See Watt, pp. 14-15. See also Scholes and Kellogg, pp. 248-249.

76. Loc.cit.

77. Watt says that Defoe 'largely shared' 'the popular Puritan aversion to fiction' (p. 90).

78. See Jose Ortega Y Gasset, The Dehumanisation of Art (Madrid, 1925): in The Dehumanisation of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture, translated by Helene Weyl (New York, 1956, Anchor Books edition), pp. 1-50, especially p. 23.

79. See e.g. F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (1948), 1962 Peregrin edition, where there is a clear causal link between Leavis' awareness of Dickens' great popularity as an entertainer and his refusal to find 'sustained seriousness' in any work by Dickens but Hard Times (p. 29).

80. October, 1964. Quoted in Robert Baldick's Introduction to the 1964 Penguin edition of Sentimental Education (translated by Baldick), p. 7.

81. Vanity Fair, 1954 Collins edition, 'Before the Curtain', p. 20.

82. Chapter 51, pp. 470-471.

83. Chapter 62, p. 574.

84. 'Before the Curtain', p. 20.

85. Op.cit., passim.

86. See Alter, pp. 180-217. 'Nabokov is the preeminent practitioner of partial magic in the novel, from Cervantes' days down to our own.' (p. 180).

87. Vanity Fair, Chapter 1, p. 25.

88. 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', in Collected Essays Vol.I pp. 319-337 (p. 337). First published as 'Character in Fiction', Criterion, Vol. II, 8 (July 1924), pp. 409-430.

89. Chapter 53, p. 487.

90. Chapter 67, p. 636.

91. See Note 30.

92. When I use the adjective 'Jamesian' I refer to what I have called 'the "show-not-tell" orthodoxy' (my p. 64), i.e. the broad tendency of James' enthusiastic disciples. James 'own precepts (as Wayne C. Booth points out in his massive study The Rhetoric of Fiction, Chicago 1961, pp. 23-24) tend to be much more flexible and subtle than those of his followers, and this is even more true of his diverse artistic practice.

93. Collected in The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel by Henry James, edited by Leon Edel (London 1957), pp. 48-59 (p. 48). First published as the Preface to Vol. XXVIII of The Universal Anthology, 1899.

94. In The Craft of Fiction (1921).

95. Preface to The Ambassadors (1903), collected in Art of Fiction, Section 17, pp. 307-326 (p. 314).

96. In Novelist at the Crossroads, pp. 247-286 (p. 250).

97. See'Crosscurrents...', pp. 258-266, for an account of the importance of Eliot and Richards in establishing critical norms, and the relationship between the two men's work. See also Malcolm Bradbury, Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel (1973), pp. 4-8, on the significance of the New Criticism's emphasis on the poem.

98. In Eliot, Selected Essays (1951), pp. 13-22 (p. 18).

99. Quoted in Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution (Moscow, 1923). Chapter 5, 'The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism': 1925 New York edition translated by Rose Strunsky, pp. 162-183 (p. 166).

100. Dehumanisation, p. 29.

101. See also Lodge, 'Crosscurrents', pp. 273-274.

102. See Craft of Fiction, 1926 edition, p. 251 and p. 263. In terms which constitute an amusingly direct reversal of more modern estimates of intrusive narration, Lubbock speaks of 'The old, immemorial, unguarded, unsuspicious way of telling a story, where the author entertains the reader, the minstrel draws his audience round him, the listeners rely upon his word.' (p. 263).

103. Beckett,Waiting for Godot (Paris, 1952), Act II: 1965 Faber edition, p. 75. Nabokov, Strong Opinions, p. 54.

104. 1960 Penguin edition, p. 214.

105. 1968 Penguin edition, p. 691.

106. Op.cit., 1949 edition, p. 74.

107. 'Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce', in Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (Paris, 1929), by Beckett and others, pp. 3-22.

108. Originally two separate works, Instantanés (Paris, 1963 and Pour un nouveau roman (Paris, 1962), translated for 1965 volume by Barbara Wright. Sarraute's Tropismes (Paris, 1939) and L'Ere du soupçon (Paris, 1956) were also originally separate volumes, translated for the 1963 volume by Maria Jolas.

109. In Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism (Birmingham 1977), p. 7. 'The Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky maintained that the end and justification of all art is that it defamiliarises things which have become dulled and even invisible to us through habit, and thus enables us to perceive the world afresh...literary modes... can fall victim to the dulling effect of habit. Experiment can become so familiar that it ceases to stimulate our powers to perception, and then more simple and straight-forward modes of writing may seem wonderfully fresh and daring. To use the jargon of the Prague school: what is foregrounded by one generation of writers becomes background for the next.' Lodge quotes a passage from Shklovsky's 'Art as Technique', collected in Russian Formalist Criticism, edited and translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965), p. 12. This passage is quoted at more length by Robert Scholes in his Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction (New Haven and London, 1974), pp. 83-84. 'Art exists to help us recover the sensation of life; it exists to make us feel things, to make the stone stony. The technique of art is to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception.'

110. Richard Poirier in his The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Language of Literary Life (1971) consistently shows a sensitive awareness to the kind of pressures that academic institutions bring to bear on the way literature is read, and even on what literature is read (see especially pp. 71-72).

Not just teachers of art but also creative artists share the 'embarrassment' I describe now that so many practising artists, particularly in America, are financed by college fellowships or engaged to help teach the creative practice of their art. Sutherland in Fiction and the Fiction Industry, Chapter 8 (pp. 148-162) deals very well with the 'schizophrenia' of 'Campus Writers', and quotes Saul Bellow, writing in The Guardian, 10 November 1976: 'Writers were swallowed up by the institutions in the fifties and sixties. They couldn't hold out against them... Anything resembling an independent literary life was simply wiped out and you had the choice of going into one of the media or going to a university.' (p. 150). The second point I make in the text, about the tendency of the academic institution to demand, covertly or overtly, some functional justification for the study of art and literature probably applies much more, within the English context, to attitudes in polytechnics than in universities, but with the current [1979] tendency towards contraction in educational spending it is unlikely that such pressures will grow less.

111. In Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs? (1973), pp. 81-90 (p. 88).

112. Novelist at the Crossroads, p. 37.

113. Fiction and the Reading Public, p. 6.

114. Op.cit., p. 26.

115. Beckett, First Love (1970): 1973 edition, p. 23. Beckett's love for bicycles and apparent preference of them to human beings is illustrated by his very first novel More Pricks than Kicks (1934) where Belacqua, though walking with his true love, can 'on no account resist a bicycle' when he sees 'a fine light machine, with red tyres and wooden rims' lying in the grass (1974 Picador eidtion, p. 26 and p. 29). Bicycles make frequent entrances into his work thereafter.

116. Novelist at the Crossroads, p. 3.

117. See Strong Opinions, p. 41 - ' I wonder if I shall ever measure again with happy hands the breadth of a lectern and plunge into my notes before the sympathetic abyss of a college audience.'

118. See my Chapter 4, pp. 297 -300 .

119. See David Lodge, Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel (1966), Section 1 (pp. 3-46) passim, where Lodge discusses reasons why criticism of fiction should have been generally inadequate compared to that of poetry.

120. 'On Re-reading Novels', Collected Essays Vol.II pp. 122-130 (p. 126). First published TLS, 20 July 1922, pp. 465-466.

121. Aspects of the Novel, p. 75.

122. 'Addenda' to Watt (Paris, 1953): 1963 Calder Jupiter edition, p. 255.

123. See Bradbury's comments quoted below.

124. Op.cit., pp. 82-83.

125. See my Chapter 3,pp.226 -227 .

126. Clarence Brown in 'Nabokov's Pushkin and Nabokov's Nabokov', collected in Nabokov: The Man and His Work, edited by L. S. Dembo (Madison Milwaukee and London, 1967), pp. 195-208, points out (pp. 203-205) that Nabokov's scholarly edition of Eugene Onegin (1964), in which Pushkin's text takes up less than a quarter of the final 4-volume compilation of introduction, notes, text and appendices, was being prepared at the time of Pale Fire's creation and bears a 'striking resemblance' to this novel which satirizes scholarly procedures - though Nabokov like Kinbote could only deserve satire through relentless length, never through academic dullness.

127. Quoted by Deirdre Bair in Samuel Beckett: A Biography (1978), p. 640.

128. 'The Death of the Author', collected in Barthes, Image - Music - Text, Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath, pp. 142-147. First published as 'La mort de l'auteur', Mantéia Vol.V, 1968.

In my Chapter 5 (pp. 411-420) I cite Barthes' brilliant analysis of the immobilising force of cultural myth in support of my case, finding suggestive analogies between the subversive operations of his demythifying mythologer and my selfconscious writers. In Le plaisir du texte (Paris, 1973: I refer to the 1976 translation by Richard Miller, The Pleasure of the Text), Barthes makes a clearer distinction between the author as an institution and the author as liberator, giver of bliss in his texts - 'As institution, the author is dead: his civil status, his biographical persona have disappeared; dispossessed, they no longer exercise over his work the formidable paternity whose account literary history, teaching and public opinion had the responsibility of establishing and renewing; but in the text, in a way, I desire the author...' (p. 27).

129. S/Z (Paris, 1970): 1975 English translation by Richard Miller, Section XC, p. 211.

130. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 247-248. 'The purpose or criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify the traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there was no context established for them.'

131. Viz. the 'proaieretic', 'hermeneutic', 'cultural', 'connotative' and 'symbolic' codes. The text of Sarrasine, a mere 33 pages at the end of S/Z (pp. 221-254), is divided by Barthes into 561 'lexias' or reading-units which are independent of Balzac's own grammatical divisions, and around the 561 lexias 217 pages of critical commentary are built which attempt in effect to reconstruct the text which Balzac, ideologically and historically blinkered, could not know he was writing. The result is doubtless brilliant and entertaining but it is also a deliberate act of cultural terrorism, an exhaustive attempt at stealing a 'classic' text from its author and the dusty pantheon of critical acceptance, as such an unsafe precedent for lesser critics dealing with later authors. At a time when literature has become part of a curriculum of institutionalised study one might well fear the attractions of such an erected 'scientific' system of critical language which may present itself as a useful blunt instrument to the student or teacher dealing with the truly subversive, ambiguous and resistant nature of the greatest literary texts, a tool to make them submit more easily to the discipline of the classroom. However, Barthes himself seems to have been aware of the dangers of authoritarianism in his approach and more recent works have tended towards the elevation of the subjective element. The Pleasure of the Text, three years later and far more erratic and idiosyncratic in structure and flavour than S/Z, makes several remarks which can be taken as postscripts to the kind of critical machinery Barthes there established. Distinguishing (with fluctuating rigour) between 'texts of pleasure', those which give conventional pleasure and comfort to the reader, and 'texts of bliss', those which are difficult, which

subvert his expectations and finally reward him with an orgasmic intensity of pleasure, Barthes admits that 'criticism always deals with the texts of pleasure, never with the texts of bliss': the blissful text can be reached 'only through another text of bliss', and the apparent implication is that the critic should operate as Barthes does in this work, as a lover nor a code-maker (p. 61). Near the end of the book, a passing comment on the etiquette of critics makes it clear how far Barthes has travelled from S/Z, and suggests he might be sympathetic to the kind of objections I have raised in my text towards the false autonomy of critical systems, l'esprit de système: 'We [critics] are scientific because we lack subtlety' (p. 61).

132. In Breakfast of Champions, p. 30.

133. See e.g. Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics (New York, 1966), compiled by de Saussure's students in 1915: Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, Fundamentals of Language, (The Hague, 1956) Parts I and II: Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale (Austin, 1970): Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (1963). First published in Paris, 1958.

134. 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', collected in Image - Music - Text, pp. 79-124 (p. 80). First published in Communications, 8 (1966).

135. 'Criticism as Language', collected in Lodge, Twentieth Century Literary Criticism, pp. 646-651 (p. 650).

136. 1977 Progress Publishers edition, pp. 44-45.

137. Given the financial predicament of the serious author as outlined in this chapter, the analysis must be stripped of its economic elements to fit him.

138. Trotsky, Literature and Revolution: '...in every one of Shakespere's dramas, the individual passion is carried to such a high degree of tension that it outgrows the individual, becomes super-personal...' (p. 242).

139. 'Life-Story', p. 127.

140. 'Aren't you rather young...', collected in volume of same name, p. 41.

141. The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism (1955).

142. 'Freud: Within and Beyond Culture', in Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning (1966), pp. 89-118 (p. 103).

143. Op.cit., p. 107.

144. Op.cit., p. 254.

145. 1971 Penguin edition, Chapter 4, pp. 219-242 (p. 232).

146. Op.cit., (translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro), Foreword, p. xx.

147. Op.cit., Chapter 1, 'A Biological Foundation for Socialism', p. 22.

148. Pour une sociologie du roman (Paris, 1964): 1975 edition, translated by Alan Sheridan, p.3.

149. See Snapshots and Towards a New Novel, passim.

150. Sociology, loc.cit.: Goldmann uses Robbe-Grillet's work precisely as a window rather than a multifaceted surface, choosing only to look through the text at a view of reified society which he has decided to see in advance.

151. Introduction to Aren't You Rather Young..., pp. 17-18.

152. 'On Re-reading Novels'., Collected Essays Vol.II, p. 125.

CHAPTER 2

VIRGINIA WOOLF

She had scribbled in the margin of her manuscript: "I am the slave of my audience."[1]

The above quotation refers to Miss La Trobe, the central artist-figure of Virginia Woolf's last work, Between the Acts, on which this chapter will concentrate its discussion. Miss La Trobe's scribbled confession points to a central feature of Woolf's art, its belief in a live and organic relationship between artist and audience. This belief has become progressively harder to maintain as the twentieth century marched on beyond her death. My introduction described the increasingly difficult economies of fiction-publishing, the commercial values of the mass market and the way in which the business of reading has become professionalised through the growth industry of literary studies. Neither Nabokov nor Beckett is able to share Woolf's straightforward commitment to her readers. Indeed, the alienation of the artist from his audience has gone so far in the second half of this century that Beckett shows his artist-figures howling in a vacuum. The narrating persona of the Trilogy scoffs at the idea of 'writing for the public',[2] and Krapp, having sold seventeen copies of his great work,[3] ends up playing tapes of his past life to himself in a mean, empty room, image of the artist who knows the audience simply isn't there. The

historical importance of Woolf's self-conception as the artist who 'could say to the world, You have taken my gift! Glory possessed her...' (p.145) thus becomes retrospectively clear. Yet it is often overlooked by critics who emphasize her rarefied sensibility (for example, Q.D. Leavis representing the Scrutiny point of view in her description of Three Guineas as 'a conversation between Mrs. Woolf and her friends',[4] or Frank Swinnerton, whose post-publication review of Between the Acts described it as the product of a mind which for all its ingenious and subtle gifts never had 'any but literary and conversational contacts with reality'.[5]) The simple fact is that Woolf was a best-selling author in her own time. She followed her sales figures and her reviews with equal avidity, as is evidenced by many passages in A Writer's Diary[6] or in the second volume of Leonard Woolf's autobiography:[7] and her final concept of art was of something which worked towards social unity and moved the artist outside any one privileged social or cultural sector -

> for one moment she held them together - the dispersing company. Hadn't she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony...the music petered out on the last word we. (p.79)

Between the Acts was the last word, posthumously published, in Virginia Woolf's artistic statement, and the music peters out, perhaps for the last time among twentieth-century modernist writers, on a chord asserting that the artist must strive above all to serve his community.

Virginia Woolf offers a useful starting-point for my three case-

studies of selfconscious artists primarily because she represents a kind of confidence in both the external functions and internal richness of art from which my other artists must be seen as falling away. Nabokov and Beckett equal or surpass her delighted exploration of the internal intricacies, but her certainty of external social function seems in the light of their doubting and circuitous approach to their audience naive. It is for this reason that I have picked upon Woolf rather than James Joyce, a contemporary and equally obvious choice: but his experiments with form are riddled with an irony which places the message-bearing function of art in doubt, and his language in Finnegans Wake (published, interestingly enough, in 1939, when Between the Acts was being written) seems to value the evolution of ever more convoluted codes far above the eventual arrival of any message. However there are other forceful reasons for the choice of Woolf, most of them springing directly from the peculiar intellectual advantages she enjoyed. These were partly inherited from her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, critic, historian, Cambridge fellow and editor of the Dictionary of National Biography.[8] She later maintained and diversified her inheritance through her central position in the Bloomsbury group, which concentrated within its bounds a concern for art and literature, philosophy and politics, psychoanalysis and economics - to name but some of its interests - unparalleled in twentieth-century English culture.[9] The selfconscious artist is essentially the educated and ever-educated artist, forced to respond to an immense barrage of stimulus and information.

Bloomsbury was characterised by passionate intellectual friendship and endless serious talk, and Virginia Woolf's critical and creative writing all bear witness to the constant influx of ideas from pioneering work in the many disciplines from which she and Leonard drew their friends. In Between the Acts, for example, we are not just referred to innovative thought in aesthetic theory: a member of the dispersing audience refers us quite casually to physics and new theories of matter (p.138). Leonard Woolf may have described his wife as 'the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition',[10] but nevertheless her marriage to him involved her in the realities of contemporary politics (for example, she went to Manchester with him to help him campaign for a parliamentary seat in 1921.)[11] Her feminist books, A Room of One's Own (1929) and Three Guineas (1938), show her lively interest in controversial public issues. The Artists' International Association asked her for her views on 'The Artist and Politics', and she told them that the artist '...is forced to take part in politics...Two causes of supreme importance to him are in peril. The first is his own survival; the other is the survival of his art.'[12] The significant phrase is 'forced to take part': the intelligent twentieth-century artist can no longer choose ignorance. Woolf herself felt a positive moral obligation to take an interest in anything which changed the consciousness of the society in and for which she worked, whether it were philosophy, politics or physics. She insisted that 'intellectually...[the artist] depends upon society...the practice of art, far from making the artist out of touch with his kind, rather increases

his sensibility'.[13]

She is obviously most vocal in those intellectual fields which are directly germane to her as a practising artist, the verbal and visual arts in her own century. Woolf had a particularly close connection with the visual arts through their most controversial and innovative English exponents, her sister Vanessa Bell, Clive Bell, Duncan Grant and Roger Fry, who organised the two highly influential Post-Impressionist exhibitions of 1910 and 1912 in London. These connections reinforced her interest in the sort of radical aesthetic speculation which has often taken dramatic effect in the visual arts long before the verbal. She wrote a biography of Roger Fry, certainly one of the most important figures in the English arts this century: Roger Fry, A Biography (1940). Fry paid the tribute of wanting her to write it.[14] Shorter essays illustrate her lively interest in such theoretical questions as the merits and demerits of 'literariness' in painting, for example the essay 'Walter Sickert',[15] whose lively discussion couched in the form of half-recalled, half-imagined dinner-party conversation vividly evokes the kind of intellectual talk for which Bloomsbury was renowned (Sickert said that 'her criticism had been the only criticism that had ever been worth having in all his life.')[16]

In her own chosen sphere, that of verbal art, her immersion in the contemporary literary world, through the Hogarth Press and her

plentiful literary journalism and reviews, gave her ample opportunity for open debate of the kind of literary issue which marked the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For the Bloomsbury group, especially perhaps Woolf and Lytton Strachey, this meant more particularly the transition between the closed rooms of family tradition, full of heavy Victorian furniture, and the fresh air which the younger generation of writers were struggling to reach, air which was necessarily full of 'the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction'.[17] We find a wealth of comment on literary experiment and innovation in the four volumes of her Collected Essays as well as her letters and the twenty-six-volume journal from which A Writer's Diary is excerpted.[18] She was not by nature an abstract theorist, preferring to write concretely and conversationally about specific works and authors, but nevertheless in the margins of her essays on specific authors there is plentiful comment and speculation on wider aesthetic issues. Her self-definition as amateur reader writing for other amateur readers[19] sometimes led her to choose deceptively general and simple titles when she wished to take up the cudgels on literary and technical questions: thus the essay innocently titled 'On Re-reading Novels' turns out to be a debate on the influential theories of Percy Lubbock as set forth in The Craft of Fiction.[20] (I shall return to the topic of Lubbock's insistence on the over-riding importance of literary form later, in the context of Between the Acts.) Situated as she was in the literary world - T.S. Eliot's obituary notice insisted that she 'was the centre, not merely of an esoteric group, but of the literary life of London' [21] - Woolf

came into contact with anything new in the way of literary ideas, from Ulysses through to The Craft of Fiction: and she usually formulated her own reactions to them either in print or in her private writings. She thus offers a textbook example of the educated twentieth-century artist who is almost forced to be self-conscious.

I do not mean to imply that the artist of previous centuries was saved by either a narrow mind or a thick skin. In A Writer's Diary Woolf quotes Maupassant on

> The writer's temperament. "Ne jamais souffrir, penser, aimer, sentir, comme tout le monde, bonnement, franchement, simplement, sans s'analyser soi-même après chaque joie et après chague sanglot."[22]

This is already a kind of besetting self-consciousness at a personal level, the perennial predicament of the writer to which she herself with her morbid over-sensitivity and social vulnerability was particularly prone. But Maupassant did not have to cope with the additional factors which demanded perpetual analysis from the writers of the century which followed his. The twentieth century bombards its writers (and its readers) with an enormously increased flow of information. In Woolf's privileged case this often took the form of manuscripts and letters and private views and private dinner-party conversation: for most writers the stimuli flood in through broadcasting and the Press, through generally improved communication and education. To take one specific example, the reviewing trade (against which Woolf inveighed with such passion in 'Reviewing' (1939)[23] written at the end of a lifetime of reviewing

and being reviewed) has grown out of all recognition and contributes in a major way towards making the artist selfconscious about what he is doing, its post-publication effects or disastrous lack of effects. But the same truth obtains on all fronts: the writer is no longer allowed to be innocent. This century insists that its writers come to terms with public cataclysm, whether the cataclysm be merely cultural, like the ferment of ideas which sent tremors out from Gordon Square, or global and historical - the terrors of the second world war. As Woolf pointed out in 'The Leaning Tower',

> Wars were...[once]...remote...Scott never saw the sailors drowning at Trafalgar; Jane Austen never heard the cannon roar at Waterloo. Neither of them heard Napoleon's voice as we do Hitler's voice as we sit at home of an evening.[24]

In the 1930s everyone had to sit tensely listening to the radio, all of them equally exposed to the terrifying uncertainties of history, the terrors of unwelcome information. Because of her hyper-articulate social circle, Woolf was exposed with peculiar intensity to specifically intellectual shocks and vibrations, but the difference is one of degree. New discoveries in the sciences, new thinking in philosophy or aesthetic theory, new bulletins from the concentration camp or torture-chamber, now reach further and faster than ever before, and no artist can be insulated. Woolf's distinction was that she was quick to recognise the nature of the phenomenon, as the above quotation from 'The Leaning Tower' proves. She is also notable for the fact that her response to the new burdens was positive and embracing.

That optimism, however, places her firmly at the end of a

tradition rather than the beginning of a new one. The twentieth-century novelist has increasingly been forced to yield up to the different specialists the nineteenth-century novelist's role as all-round pundit, unabashed commentator on social, political and intellectual life. D.H. Lawrence in his heart-cry of an essay, 'Why the Novel Matters',[25] seeks to regain old ground by insisting that the novel's importance rests precisely upon this lack of specialisation, its consequent ability to look at things whole. The tone is very different from Woolf's but they occupy a similar position at the embattled end of an era whose artistic creed included the ideal of unity and integration:-

> 'The whole is greater than the part...being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog.'[26]

Woolf has a less arrogant attitude towards the other 'great masters': she is more likely to plunder their work and adapt it to her own ends than to set out, as Lawrence did, to invent her own political philosophy, psychology and 'science' of race. But Woolf and Lawrence are alike in their acceptance of a duty to try and understand and debate the whole of human life, including all those aspects which might seem most distant from the aesthetic domain. They both insist that the artist's most useful gifts are comprehensive awareness -

> 'Taste, sound, movement...a man coming in, a woman going out...the motor that passes in the street or the beggar who shuffles along the pavement...[the artist] can no more cease to receive impressions than a fish in mid-ocean...'[27]

and unifying vision:

> let...[the artist's]...rhythmical sense wind itself in and out among men and women, omnibuses, sparrows - whatever comes along the street - until it has strung them together in one harmonious whole.[28]

This unifying vision and Woolf's burning need to believe in its power to unify men finds its fullest expression in her last work, Between the Acts. Situated as the book is, however, near the violent end of her own life and the violent beginning of the second world war, - situated as it seems to be also at the end of one literary tradition, - Woolf's assertion of hope retrospectively acquires a tragic and ironic ring for the literary historian.

Many artists writing after Woolf shared her intellectual self-consciousness: they did not share her optimism. For Nabokov and Beckett selfconsciousness had another all-important dimension, a restrictive one, where it means above all the consciousness of limitations: not just the limitations of their audience, which I spoke of at the beginning of this chapter, but also the limitations in what art can deal with or hope to achieve. Neither of these later artists expects his books to transmute men's perception of the world in the way that Woolf does. Certainly neither hopes, like Lawrence, to change the world. They no longer feel that they should or even could deal with the great contemporary issues frontally on the pages of their fictions. Nabokov for all his sensitivity to the horrors of history turns away to a privileged, radiant and basically unreal present, tinged with the glory of 'the Ardours and Arbours of Ardis',[29] purged by his deliberate decree of overt political content.[30] Beckett takes the retreat to its logical limit in The Unnamable where he seeks to reject any kind of human

content.[31] I would suggest that this kind of retreat stems basically from just the kind of plethora of knowledge, plethora of perspective which is exemplified in the case of Virginia Woolf; but where she was able to embrace and make use of this stressful excess of knowledge in her work, subsequent authors more often vocalised their perplexity and despair (like Beckett in the Trilogy) or silently withdrew to the eyrie and took a golden-eagle's-eye-view, like Nabokov. In Beckett's fiction selfconsciousness knows a stifling and paralysed end: yet it starts off the journey with Virginia Woolf's confident assertion of the power of the mind to comprehend and render comprehensible all the conflicting imperatives to knowledge which the intellectual ambience of Bloomsbury in the early twentieth century presented to her.

Having asserted the significance of Woolf's situation in the Bloomsbury group, it is only fair to record her own doubts about biographical readings of literature. In 'How Should One Read a Book?', an early paper read at a school, she wrote 'How far, we must ask ourselves, is a book influenced by its writer's life - how far is it safe to let the man interpret the writer?'[32] And she wrote admiringly of the 'impersonality' that Henry James' books ultimately achieved,existing independently of their author,'all with the final seal upon them of artistic form, which, as it imposes its stamp, sets apart the object thus consecrated and makes it no longer part of ourselves.'[33] With those warnings ringing in our ears we conclude our survey of the factors which helped make Virginia Woolf, as historical character and high

priestess of Bloomsbury, selfconscious, and pass on to detailed study of the makers of art in her own books.

Such portraits of the artist as we find in her first two full-length novels, The Voyage Out (1915) and Night and Day (1919) do not take us all that far from biography since they seem to represent in part a direct and irritated response to the special circumstances of Woolf's own intellectual upbringing. The first work bases itself upon an antithesis which was to recur constantly through Woolf's novels, albeit in an increasingly sophisticated form: that between the instinctive, creative, characteristically feminine sensibility - here epitomised by the naive and doomed heroine, Rachel Vinrace, and her novelist lover, Terence Hewet - and the narrow, categorising, crusty, donnish kind of intellectualising represented here by a whole gallery of masculine scholars, Ridley Ambrose, Mr. Pepper, Hughling Elliott, and the arrogant, unhappy St.John Hirst. In her attack on the latter kind of conventional and deadening thinker Woolf is attempting much the same kind of demolition of the previous generation of sober Cantabrigians, her ancestors, as Lytton Strachey was later to bring off triumphantly in Eminent Victorians (1918). But this first charge against the enemy,

> "Ugly in body, repulsive in mind"...[who] sits hour after hour with his toes on the fender, talking about philosophy and God and his liver...[in] a cosy, smoky, masculine place...[34]

is clearly more of a personal thrust against the funereal atmosphere engendered by Leslie Stephen, from which his two daughters fled so

gratefully to late-night cocoa and buns and whisky in Gordon Square,[35] than a serious statement about what is or is not hostile to artistic temperament. The same can be said about the gentler ironies of the depiction of the Hilberries in Night and Day, a distinguished intellectual family whose insistence on literary ancestor-worship blights the life of the free-spirited daughter of the house, Katherine. Night and Day however spreads its satire more evenly, because we also find a fairly scathing caricature of the absurder excesses of the emotional artistic temperament in the ill-disciplined poet William Rodney and his 'melodious and whimsical'[36] mistress Cassandra. In both these books there is a general sense of young people setting out on life and endlessly discussing their discoveries, and the debating positions taken up seem rather to be part of the beginning authoresses own excited uncertainty than the fruit of mature conviction. (Woolf's actual years - she was thirty-three when The Voyage Out was published - do not make her a mature artist.) Perhaps the most significant passages in both books from the point of view of Woolf's subsequent development describe the attraction towards pure form of the creative spirit: thus the novelist Hewet speaks of what he wants to do in writing novels -

> "...Things I feel come to me like lights... I want to combine them... Have you ever seen fireworks that make figures?... I want to make figures..."[37]

And in Night and Day, where Woolf is clearly working out some temporary revulsion against the more frivolous side of the literary world, her heroine, the intelligent, questing Katherine, finds she

preferred the exactitude, the star-like impersonality, of figures to the confusion, agitation, and vagueness of the finest prose'.[38] Both of these quotations from the mouths of Woolf's early fictional intellectuals seem to point in the direction of her future move away from the mode of amassed realistic detail and towards a kind of selective and carefully-balanced internal geometry.

Yet the arrival is a long way off. These are essentially traditional novels in which the artists and intellectuals portrayed are merely characters in the nineteenth-century tradition of the artist-character, giving only sporadic insight into the artistic methods or goals of the working authoress who employs them. In a memorable phrase Terence Hewet says that he "want[s] to write a novel about Silence...the things people don't say..."[39] This was precisely what Woolf was to do at the very end of her career in Between the Acts, where most of the poetry and the rythmic movement is concentrated in the carefully judged pause between the acts, in the reflective silence between two sentences, in the hesitation between conceiving of a course of action and following another one. Such a novel depends upon the limiting of happenstance and the chatter of the phenomenal world in order that the interrelated patternings which the novelist imposes upon the 'distilled essence of emptiness' (p.38) may clearly emerge. It was not until her last book, some two dozen years after formulating Hewet's ambition "to write...about silence" that Woolf was able to command the necessary ruthlessness towards the incidental fascinations of the actual to

allow the imaginary 'unacted part' (p.107) to shine through. Only thus can she assert the primacy of the equally imaginary form of the art-work, something which in its self-sufficient and delicate rythmical impetus does indeed approach 'the exactitude, the star-like impersonality, of figures'[40] which attracted her second heroine. It seems worth dwelling at some length on the first two novels in order to insist how long was the road which Woolf's quest after technical innovation led her to travel. Those many readers who concentrate on her work after Jacob's Room, by general critical consent the first of her 'experimental' novels, may fail to get a sense of her historical roots in the mainstream nineteenth-century narrative novel, and consequently of the strenuous and radical measures she took in the course of her artistic career to examine the existing model of fiction and 'break her and bully her'[41] until the fictional mould fitted Woolf's own chosen ends. This kind of linear pilgrimage through formal innovation in pursuit of a self-appointed artistic end is typical of the restless, perfectionist, selfconscious author of this century, as we shall later see most clearly in the case of Samuel Beckett.

Thus in Woolf's first two full-length novels we find a fairly traditional artist telling traditional stories, about tangled love-affairs and the initiation of the young into life and the peculiarities of the old as seen from a youthful standpoint. Narrative certainty does not seem to present any grave problem to the authoress, and her characters are clear-edged, with definite and reliable traits. However, this does not tell the whole story about

Woolf's artistic development at the time. In 1921 she published a collected volume of eight short stories, Monday or Tuesday, which included material she had been writing and publishing since 1917. Leonard Woolf describes in his foreword to the 1943 anthology of Virginia's short stories, A Haunted House, how throughout her life his wife would rough out an idea in short story form just as it came to her, and then put it away still at the sketch stage until an editor required a story.[42] The short story would thus naturally have been a vehicle for trying out any experimental projects of hers and working out artistic doubts and perplexities which she wanted to keep below the carefully elaborated surface of her full-length works. Accordingly it is here that we first find Woolf attempting the kind of artist-portraiture which is of interest to this study, with the fictional artist resolving her perplexities through the medium of the fiction which contains her. Moreover, in 'The Mark on the Wall',[43] 'Kew Gardens'[44] and 'An Unwritten Novel',[45] the kind of problems which she explicitly confronts - plurality of perspective, the uncertainty and error in human hypothesis about cause and effect, about history and that peculiar version of human history which we know as 'character' - are those which will preoccupy Woolf throughout her working life. She herself emphasized the importance of the connection between her short fiction and her first 'experimental' novel, Jacob's Room, in her journal, written the day after her thirty-eighth birthday and with Jacob's Room ('a new form for a new novel') conceived that very afternoon:

> Suppose one thing should open out of another - as in An Unwritten Novel - only not for 10 pages but 200 or so... conceive(?) Mark on the Wall, K.G. and Unwritten

Novel taking hands and dancing in unity...[46]

'The Mark on the Wall', the first of the stories to be written, exemplifies the technique of all those finally gathered together in the collected volume of 1944 in its concentration upon the bewildering and entrancing multiplicity of hypothesis which can be supported by a physical 'fact', in this case a mark which the observing persona notices six or seven inches above the mantelpiece. He or she proceeds to spin historical conjecture - is it the mark left by a nail from which a miniature once hung? Is it a rose-leaf? - and even philosophical speculation around it until the final paragraph, when the more clearly perceiving eye of another discerns that the magical mark is in fact a mundane snail. Meanwhile the novelistic imagination has been allowed a most enjoyable canter, and plenty of space equally to dramatise its own uncertainties and difficulties:

> Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; the inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity!...the rapidity of life, the perpetual waste and repair; all so casual, all so haphazard...

Woolf distrusts the physical surfaces of things, wants to make use of them to pierce to more secure and more significant perception: 'I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts.'[47] She poses a duality between the profound and instinctual apprehension of large truths which is her highest end, as a novelist, and the kind of restrictive and basically deceptive desire for certainties and accuracies which she parodied in the dons of The Voyage Out, as we have seen, and which in all her

works except the last is pilloried as male assertiveness, part of the arid scimitar of the male'.[48] It is the reverence for amassed facts and catalogued detail which she disliked and distrusted in the previous generation of male novelists. She felt that too much respect for appearances and apparent truths allowed the real truth to escape entirely: despite Arnold Bennett's 'magnificent apparatus for catching life', 'Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worthwhile.'[49] Already in 'The Mark on the Wall' she longed to escape the disappointing surface of things, where her 'mark' was merely a snail and precisions and measurements ruled, into the rich subterranean world of the artistic imagination. She imagines hopefully a

> world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin, grazing the stems of the water-lilies, hanging suspended over nests of white sea eggs...[50]

'An Unwritten Novel', the third of the stories Woolf picked out herself in her diary as indicating the path ahead, deals with exactly the same kind of tension between the blank fact and the infinite variety of faces with which the novelist could fit it, but this time the observing eye is more explicitly that of the ambitious narrator, anxious to bestow biography on the pale, colourless, twitching woman who sits opposite her in a railway compartment on the journey to Eastbourne. 'Leaning back in my corner, shielding my eyes from her eyes....I read her message, deciphered her secret, reading it beneath her gaze.'[51] The secret that she deciphers (or in fact invents) is that the woman is called Minnie Marsh, a wretched

spinster off to visit her bullying sister-in-law, and the novelistic fancies about Minnie's destination proliferate among imagined aspidistras and claret-coloured curtains. Hypothesis becomes ever more vivid, circumstantial and confident to the point where the train reaches Eastbourne, and the narrator helps 'Minnie' out with the smug reflection, 'Minnie, though we keep up pretences, I've read you right -'[52] only to be utterly 'confounded' when the supposed 'spinster's' real-life son arrives to meet her and

> off they go, down the road, side by side...Well, my world's done for! What do I stand on? What do I know? That's not Minnie...Who am I? Life's bare as bone....And yet the last look of them...floods me anew. Mysterious figures! Mother and son. Who are you?...Where tonight will you sleep, and then, tomorrow?[53]

Thwarted of her first over-simplified reading of the world of appearances, the novelistic eye at first falters and loses belief in itself, but then is enchanted again by the very multiplicity of truth. It is the story of an artistic discovery. Woolf herself was at first appalled by the inadequacy and clumsiness of established fictional techniques for dealing with something so evanescent and shimmering as human character or narrative cause and effect. She was haunted by the refrain which echoes like a warning through the title story of the 1921 volume, Monday or Tuesday - 'and truth?... and truth?...truth?'[54] But ultimately she is led onwards by that same tantalising intangibility in the phenomenal world to seek out different kinds of perceived truth beyond the deceptive surface, and different techniques for describing the surfaces themselves - provisional, impressionistic, and multi-perspectival, like the narrative mode of 'Kew Gardens'.

This second of the three stories picked out by the authoress as significant to Jacob's Room is built entirely around shifting viewpoints, from the personal to the impersonal to the literal snail's-eye view. There is no central narrating persona, and yet this very refusal of a static vision creates a portrait of the artist by default. Woolf here demonstrates that if the artist is to have any hope of crystallising the 'truth' about this sunny, dreamy, heat-hazed day in Kew Gardens, - the flickering truth of colours and shadows which move according to the wind and the floating perceptions of the men and women drifting in the languid heat across the canvas, - she must be everywhere and nowhere: above all, she must be in the very language with which the story is told, so that doubt, surmise and alternative choice is inset into each act of description. Thus the very first sentence questions as it states: 'From the oval-shaped flower-bed there rose perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves half-way up...' [my itals.] Easy similes are eschewed, doubt seeds the metaphor: '....men and women straggled past the flower-bed with a curiously irregular movement not unlike that of the white and blue butterflies who crossed the turf in zig-zag flights from bed to bed' [my itals.][55] Linguistic effects are echoed by the effects of light: lovers stroll into closeup for a moment, but 'soon diminished in size among the trees and looked half transparent as the sunlight and shade swam over their backs in large trembling irregular patches '. Suddenly we are down with the snail, and the minute becomes monstrous:

> Brown cliffs with deep green green lakes in the hollows,

> flat, blade-like trees that waved from root to tip, round boulders of grey stone... all these objects lay across the snail's progress between one stalk and another to his goal.[56]

Then human feet recall us to an anthropocentric world-view, but one at the far edge of normality, that of a lunatic out walking with his guardian and telling him eagerly how '"now, with this war, the spirit matter is rolling between the hills like thunder."[57] And the old man's view of the flowers is quite different from the intensively visual image of the story's opening paragraphs, for he bends 'to answer a voice speaking from it... [and] began talking about the forests of Uraguay which he had visited hundreds of years ago in company with the most beautiful young woman in Europe'.[58] We end with a young couple who focus in their half-articulate, tentative discourse the tensions around which the story is built: after a fragmentary exchange - '"O, anything - I mean - you know what I mean"'[59] - gestures take over, and dizzy hypothesis, both theirs and the author's, about the world of things:

> ...the fact that his hand rested on the top of hers expressed their feelings in a strange way, as these short insignificant words also expressed something, words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far and thus alighting awkwardly upon the very common objects that surrounded them....but who knows...what precipices aren't concealed in them, or what slopes of ice don't shine in the sun on the other side?[60]

In the end life is infinitely unknowable and surprising: 'Who has ever seen this before?'[61] And so all solid forms and factual assurances dissolve in a sense of the strangeness of things, as the human figures dissolve into a generalised miasma of colour and heat

at the end of the story,

> one couple after another....passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved..."[62]

Even <u>this</u> final vision folds outward disconcertingly into another as we are reminded that the Gardens themselves are only a tiny part of the picture, that outside the Gardens the city murmurs on 'like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another...'[63] When every perceptual frame is just one of an endless succession of Chinese boxes, and when each box changes the interpretation of the world, the artist must be infinitely mobile and infinitely ready to revise his conclusions. He must also be aware of the intrinsic ache and difficulty in the writer's art. Writing is a matter of choosing words to communicate the uncommunicable, words which deprive objects of their magic depths, 'words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning', and structuring sentences provisionally, with a sort of abortive hope in the reader - '"I mean - you know what I mean"'.[64] Stating these difficulties so lucidly in this very early story, and making their substance the subject matter of the piece, Woolf is already some way towards transforming them from a sticking-point to a focal source of energy and excitement in her work. The dialectical progression is a common one to the selfconscious writer. He despairs of his art, makes art of the despair, and out of that alchemising transaction derives new ideas about how to surmount his formal limitations.

The 'layer after layer of green blue vapour' in which solid and symmetrical outlines are 'enveloped' in 'Kew Gardens' is clearly spiritual cousin to the nimbus she describes in a much-quoted passage from the essay she wrote in the same year, 1919, 'Modern Fiction': 'Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged...[but] a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.'[65] This sentence serves as a luminous halo illuminating all the work which followed in the path of her experimental early short stories. Jacob's Room in 1922 set out to copy not the linear gig-lamps but a semi-transparent idea: its series of vignettes evoke the impedimenta of a man's life when he himself is just an absence, an invisible shape which yet casts a shadow upon innumerable other lives. The form is based upon the 'room' of the title, which we find at the end of the book left empty by Jacob's death, all the scraps and souvenirs of his abortive existence left lying about at random.[66] Only this final sequence unlocks the secret of the form of the book, which has been based upon precisely this scene in an empty jumbled room. The room symbolises the shell constituted by other people's perceptions of us, the emotions and memories they attach to our persons: the shell survives in its own right without us, though it is indeed the space within which we exist, patched together from conjectures, hung about with trophies and darkened by old scars. The private and central self still escapes and is unknowable, just as Jacob escapes by his death. In effect, Jacob's Room is a full-length version of 'An Unwritten Novel', in other

words a novel which demonstrates what a novel cannot catch, and dramatises that omission into the driving impulse of the narrative. We spend the book searching for Jacob, as the novelist must in vain. But the idea of shaping the book's narrative around the form of the abandoned room is a brilliant technical innovation, one which asserts the importance of the form of the art-work as a consciously constructed object independent of representational fidelity.

Speculating over the possible profession of her hero as it might be adjudged by the world, on appearance and manner alone, Woolf gives the following significant exchange. Could Jacob be 'A writer? He lacked self-consciousness'.[67] Selfconsciousness, then, is established as the writer's characterising trait, and Jacob's Room asserts this at length without constructing an author-character - what is constantly in the middle of the stage is something much less personalised, i.e. Woolf's original manner of constructing an art-object. In making this assertion I differ from Barry Morgenstern's reading in his promisingly-titled article, 'The Self-conscious Narrator in Jacob's Room'.[68] He agrees that Jacob's Room is selfconscious but makes that judgement solely on the strength of Woolf's insertion of a personal narrating voice into the text: according to his account she shows her own hand and thus gives 'a portrait of an artist' which is essentially a self-portrait. The core of Jacob's Room however is surely something much more elusive than what he makes it, 'a picture of the speaker, our thirty-five-year-old woman'.[69] Selfconsciousness in Jacob's Room does not

have any such restrictions of age and sex. He seems to have located his thirty-five-year-old authoress in the text's recurrent interruptions of comment and question. Yet Woolf interrupts on much more than her own behalf, as the characteristic use of 'one' or 'they say' suggests. Jacob's Room is not only the story of the creation of a book, though even at that level the relevance of its selfconscious concern with narrative problems extends to all other acts of literary creation. It is perhaps even more important here though to insist that 'one' is the lay observer as well as the literary woman, that the narrative voice expresses doubt that we all feel. The interruptions and questions keep the mind of the reader constantly alert to the perplexities of narrative and stop him being immersed in the delights of simple description. Instead he is referred to the kind of hesitation and inadequacy that reader and writer must share with every honest observer of a puzzling world: 'One word is sufficient. But if one cannot find it?'[70]

Jacob is glimpsed by an elderly lady sharing his railway-carriage on the way to Cambridge, in a passage closely reminiscent of 'An Unwritten Novel', and her conclusions about him are left deliberately incomplete:

> presumably he was in some way or other - to her at least - nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built, like her own boy? One must do the best one can with her report...It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done....[71]

Another passage throws light on the aspect of Percy Lubbock's theoretical position which Woolf most distrusted, its tendency (as

she thought) to dissociate formal concerns from all others, so that the form became 'something interposed between us and the book as we know it'.[72] Woolf on the other hand sees the intellectual questions which her formal innovations raise as vitally interconnected with the kind of question we all ought to be asking about life, and her forms are therefore in the end the best way of apprehending reality, even when they seem most blatantly to violate realistic convention.

> Every face, every shop, bedroom window, public-house, and dark square is a picture feverishly turned - in search of what? It is the same with books. What do we seek through millions of pages? Still hopefully turning the pages - oh, here is Jacob's room.[73]

Question, then, is not just one of Woolf's preferred formal narrative devices, it is the best way of approaching the everyday puzzles of the phenomenal world. Books are only a special case of the general rule that men must seek and doubt - 'What do we seek through millions of pages?' In Woolf's book what we find is ultimately an enigma - 'oh, here is Jacob's room.' The room is only a shell: and that shell of form tacitly expresses the puzzlement Woolf reads into the minds of the men of action who administer the vast violent forces that will finally wake Jacob's mother from her half-sleep and blow Jacob to bits in Greece. These men in their 'clubs and cabinets' feel the inadequacy of frivolous 'character-drawing' by the novelist trying to deal with the brutal modern world:

> It is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force. They say that the novelists never catch it; that it goes hurtling through their nets and leaves them torn to ribbons.[74]

The forces of life both impel the world and shatter easy novelistic

formulae about it, leaving more honest novelists with endless problems, plus the delight of tentative solutions. Jacob's Room examines and enjoys the vacuum left when life or a part of life, the existence of Jacob in the flesh, has been violently torn away before the novelist's art set to work. It is very evident that Woolf enjoys her first experimental novel, a delighted display of broken nets, narrative torn into multicoloured ribbons, fragmented conventions.

Thus in Woolf's earlier work the artist is established as a source of endless curiosity. Curiosity revitalises the static vision of the world which she feels that novelists like Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy have given their readers. Her essay 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' attacks her predecessors for believing that narrative can be reduced to indisputable facts in an indisputable order. Where Woolf sees an old woman on the train as a teasing enigma, the older generation of writers, backed by the unthinking British public, say

> Old women have houses. They have fathers. They have incomes. They have servants. They have hot-water bottles. That is how we know they are old women.[75]

Woolf wants her readers to give up such certainties in order to know, in the end, very much more. She therefore tries to establish the artist in our eyes as an image-breaker who speaks most naturally in the interrogative. Here is her parody of more traditional narrative procedures which take as their starting-point a series of comfortable imperatives: 'Begin by saying that her father kept a shop in Harrogate. Ascertain the rent. Ascertain the wages of

shop assistants in the year 1878...'[76] Before she will allow Bennett's charge that the younger novelists 'are unable to create characters that are real'[77] she has a fundamental question of her own to ask - '...I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality?'[78] The question will echo on through her work, with its subsidiary implications, stated through shifting perspective and collapsing hypothesis: what is our size and place in the world? How can we grasp and understand each other? How can we communicate our feelings to another human being, when we can hardly formulate them for ourselves? In her portrait of the artist, the artist is exemplary sufferer, publicly wracked by the kind of undertainty which for most of us is just a succession of half-articulated private quandaries.

The interrogative mood is endemic to selfconsciousness. Woolf's own fondness for question has more localised roots also, such as the intellectual manners of the famous Cambridge 'Apostles' Club' where so many of the male members of Bloomsbury had become confirmed agnostics:

> Absolute candour was the only duty...truth as we saw it then and there was what we had to embrace and maintain, and there were no propositions so well established that an Apostle had not the right to deny or question.....[79]

Leonard Woolf described the mature inhabitants of Bloomsbury as 'questioning the truth and utility of everything'.[80] Thus in twentieth-century Cambridge and Bloomsbury the original postfeudal rebellion against absolute truths, absolute authority, received dogma was energetically re-enacted. But Cambridge and Bloomsbury

were really just hyper-articulate examples of a prevailing mood. Woolf's questionings reflect the scepticism and anarchy characteristic of her generation, living near the beginning of a century which was radically different from the relatively extroverted and self-confident nineteenth century in which the Editor of the Dictionary of National Biography had compiled his museum of documentary facts. Woolf's generation tried to pursue their lives in a world irrevocably changed by the first world war, and darkened by the threat of a second. Because she was an artist, she expressed this prevailing climate through a 'modernist' fragmentation of aesthetic form, embodying all the self-questioning of a pronouncedly insecure and selfconscious age.

This is what invalidates the complaints of those who accused her of fleeing from life into 'cleverness', like Bennett,[81] or the much more conventional novelist Storm Jameson who said in 1929 of Woolf

> ...she lacks humanity...She sees as an artist...She can reproduce a scene with the fidelity and clear colouring of a Brueghel.[82] And think about it until she has destroyed it.

What Storm Jameson fails to understand is that this 'thinking about it' - the questioning, worrying, reflexive technique which Woolf uses to undermine the easy descriptive effects she might well have employed - is not a matter of complexifying the superficies of the art-work with a view to her own refined aesthetic pleasure. She is trying to express a truth about the consciousness of her age, and she feels it cannot be done with the language of a previous one. Unlike Joyce however she never carried experimentation with

language and form to the point where it emperilled communication with the contemporary readership she sought to serve. Woolf's portraits of the artist at work were from the first intended to make people see, to make her readers work with her towards a new vision, to substantiate her as yet unvoiced claim, '"I am the slave of my audience"'. Essentially she saw no gulf between her own hypersensitive and provisional perception of the world and her readers': she may have had the gift of verbal formulation, but truth was something at once evanescent and democratic and could be siezed in a synthesizing instant by anyone, even the old blind woman with a camp-stool who sits singing from her 'sinful, tanned heart' by Smith's Bank in Jacob's Room.[83] Vision was a universal possibility, but double-vision and doubt could also swoop upon us all. Even dim and beautiful Florinda knows that 'there are formidable sights in the streets' of which she understands nothing. Opening Shelley over her chocolate creams, she asks the same question that Woolf dutifully and repeatedly asks of life - 'What on earth was it about?'[84]

The artist as source of inquiring vision is equally central to the artist-portraits of the books which follow Jacob's Room. Thus in To the Lighthouse (1927) Lily Briscoe strives to find a way of integrating her concept of Mrs. Ramsay into a work of art which combines both the instinctive feminine and the analytic masculine insights. In The Waves (1931) Bernard is 'perpetually making notes in the margin of my mind for some final statement'[85] for the novel which he never writes, although the novel which encloses him is

largely controlled in its course by his restless marginal notes. Louis in the same book represents the poet's, as opposed to Bernard's novelistic, sensibility, and his province is the concentrated and achieved as opposed to the discursive and hypothetical. Yet he is portrayed at the moment when he is straining every sinew to crystallise the vision of the poem, still searching, still striving, rather than after that vision is won:

> I...must weave together, must plait into one cable the many threads, the thin, the thick, the broken, the enduring of our long history, of our tumultuous and varied day.[86]

The interrogative mood continues. All the same, a significant development in Woolf's treatment of art occurs between the portrait of Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse and the composite artist-portrait of The Waves, where Bernard, Louis, Neville, Rhoda all represent different facets of the artistic personality. In the artist-portraits of the early stories and earlier novels there is a slightly breathless quality, and in the stories especially there is a sense that Woolf's own pressing technical perplexities and enthusiasms are being transferred in a fairly unmediated fashion to the pages. The problems of art are the problems of the artist in her study. Lily is not a professional artist like the influential Mr. Paunceforte, she is entirely solitary, working to satisfy the exigencies of her imagination only, with no wider audience in mind. The problems which exercise her and the book in its long last section, as she tries to complete her canvas, are to do with the individual creative act in which she is involved, with her own internal debates about perception and composition. The book ends as her canvas is completed: 'It was done: it was finished.

Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.'[87] There is no sense that the canvas must be seen by others and exist for them. The Waves, by the mere fact of splitting the artistic sensibility into four different substantial portraits, represents a movement outwards: Lily was Woolf's private puppet, but it is harder to impose your private stamp on four different faces. Moreover, Lily is seen only at a succession of isolated points in time, usually while actually engaged in her painting. Bernard, Louis, Neville and Rhoda are depicted from childhood to old age, and their creative impulses are only part of what we know of them: we see them also as figures with jobs and habits and families and lovers and ambitions, however poeticised the evocation of all these things is. Art has become part of a context. The questions which preoccupy its practitioners are no longer merely internal. Louis has to reconcile his secret evening life as a poet with his successful daily life as a business man: Rhoda has to try to make her agonized artistic sensibility negotiate the impossible chasms and ridges of everyday life: Neville pursues his love of poetry through the narrow channel between the over-tidiness of donnish life and the gigantic untidiness of his romantic passions: Bernard's commitment to art struggles with his endless fascination for the externals of life, his fear of the solitude that art would demand. The portrait of the artist which we derive from these four lives has acquired a new depth and range, a newly objective quality. Rhoda is most clearly assimilable to a literal self-portrait of Woolf, but in combination with the other three she serves as part of a varied

study of artistic vocation and the artistic temperament, and the kind of stresses which everyday life imposes on the artist.

Between the Acts was written nine years after The Waves was finished, and in those nine years Woolf knew great public success in terms of sales and tried her hand at many different kinds of literary enterprise - quantities of review and polemic: more spoof biography, as in Flush (1933), and more feminist politicking, in Three Guineas (1938): a reversion to semi-traditional narrative fiction in The Years (1937): real biography, with Roger Fry (1940). Meanwhile the Hogarth Press flourished, and she had risen to the unquestioned eminence described by Eliot in his obituary tribute, as 'the centre...of the literary life of London'. She had watched the varied careers and publications of her friends, survived renewed threats of illness, suffered the encroaching political darkness of the years which led up to the war. Except in her rare black periods, she had produced a great number of words, and she had lived nine more years of largely rural tranquillity with Leonard in which she had known, as her journal testifies, great happiness: part of the entry for 9 January 1941, just over two months before her death, asserts that 'all life is so fair, at my age'.[88] The end of that entry says that she is 'copying P.H.'. 'P.H.' stands for 'Poyntzet Hall', her early name for Between the Acts. Despite Woolf's suspicion of biographical interpretations of literature, one might suggest that this is the book in which she expressed all the richness of her mature experience, a secure sense of herself as a practising artist in the community, a wide-ranging knowledge of the contemporary problems of art, a growing capacity to accomodate conflict and tension as part of the scheme of things, to survive. Sure of herself, she can look outwards as never

before. Accordingly, the artist-portrait of Between the Acts differs in two main ways from the earlier portraits. First, though Woolf still insists that the preliminary task of the artist is to query, disturb and fragment, she also celebrates the artist-as-unifier, the giver of comprehensive vision in which all contradictory perspectives play their part. Secondly, she depicts an artist who exists in essential symbiosis with his audience, so that the audience come forward into the centre of the stage to play their part in the artistic experience. The final actualisation of the art-work takes place as it is received and judged by the community for which it is intended. Art is a public and social phenomenon, something very different from the kind of private ecstasy experienced by Lily Briscoe, whose work was complete when the form on the canvas finally matched her individual vision.

Between the Acts describes the staging, in the open air of a small English village on a summer's day, of a pageant of English history: it is acted by the villagers, watched by the local gentry, the reporter, the vicar and two visiting representatives of the 'fast life' of the London arty set, written and produced by the dubiously respectable Miss La Trobe, a mannish, solitary lady of mature years who once lived with an actress and is cordially disliked for her oddities by the community she serves. Scenes from the pageant are interspersed with longer sections recreating the imaginative lives of members of the audience. Their individual patterns of love and hatred, ambition, sorrow and sexual desire are related to the themes of the pageant, and the language in which

Woolf realises their private thoughts is related very closely in terms of rhythm and rhyme to the artificial language of the pageant, increasingly so as the book gathers internal momentum and gradually abandons its commitment to copying external reality as commonly understood. Between the Acts in the end constitutes an integrated art-work whose main narrative content is the execution and reception of another, the pageant. The intervals fold around its acts, conversational prose folds into the rhythms of dramatic poetry. Individual studies of the audience supply the element of intimate relations omitted by the public pageant, with its controlled and formal evocation of continuity and change in English social life and manners. The book thus demonstrates in its own form the central theme of unity, on which all others dance attendance: the prime aim of art is shown to be the expression of a unifying vision. Furthermore, Woolf's hope is that the audience of the art-work will itself be unified by its shared experience of her creation: the villagers, united by the drama of the pageant that they watch, stand for Woolf's own less rustic readers, brought together by the drama of her pages.

The novel qualifies for our attention in this study first on the obvious plane where a fictional artist, Miss La Trobe, is portrayed, where literary and aesthetic issues are openly debated, and a fictional art-work, the pageant, is presented and discussed. But it also qualifies on a broader front as selfconscious art in the same way that Jacob's Room did, perpetually drawing attention to its own existence as an integrated artefact, an art-object with

its own controlling design, something like Katherine Hilbery's 'star-like impersonality of figure...'[89] I shall consider Between the Acts as selfconscious art in this second sense before I pass on to the specific portrait of Miss La Trobe and the conclusions she leads us to draw about twentieth-century art. Between the Acts declares itself as an independent formal entity most obviously through the unnaturally heightened rhythms it uses for thoughts and conversation, with frequent musical repetitions of phrases - 'Dispersed are we' (pp.78, 79, etc.), 'Chuff, chuff, chuff sounded from the bushes' (pp.65, 69 etc.), 'The tick, tick, tick seemed to hold them together, tranced' (pp.69 and 116). Repeated motifs have the same effect: again and again our attention is drawn to wind, swallows, trees, mirrors, Mrs. Swithin's Outline of History. The echoes insist their own poetry, drawing the whole together and asserting its identity as a complex celebration of unity. In this respect Between the Acts fits into the line of self-declaring art-works which began with Jacob's Room (the novel in the form of the empty room) and carried on through To the Lighthouse (the novel as odyssey towards the light-house, arriving as the book ends) and The Waves (the novel as a succession of rhythmical bands of perception, rising and falling until for the last time with the book's last sentence 'The waves broke on the shore'.) Between the Acts gives us the novel as pageant of unity.

The theme of unity is both explicitly discussed (by a 'one-making' character like Mrs. Swithin (p.130) or the Reverend Streatfield)

and implicitly demonstrated through the action of the novel. The demonstration takes place on three planes, temporal, spatial and human, all of which interlock. On the temporal plane, English social life is presented in the pageant as a continuum from the middle ages which can still be appreciated and enjoyed by its twentieth-century observers. Mrs. Swithin's visionary reading of her Outline of History enables her to see '"rhododendrons in the Strand; and mammoths in Piccadilly"' (p.33), 'increasing the bounds of the present by flights into past or future' (p.19). We are told that Figgis's Guide Book to the village, though published in 1833, 'still told the truth. 1833 was true in 1939' (p.49). The reflective artist is self-aware also about her location on the continuum of time: the moment is one more link in an endless and resonant chain, binding men and their history together. (This is the one quibble I would make about Marilyn Zorn's sympathetic article, 'The Pageant in Between the Acts'.[90] Recognising the central unifying function of the pageant, she speaks first of 'a transcending of ordinary chronological time' and then says more categorically that 'The Pageant is... the world without time'.[91] It seems more to the point that the pageant glorifies the promise of continuity which all tradition makes, and also derives a great deal of aesthetic energy from the contrasts endemic to historical sequence. It enjoys its unifying travel through time and suggests that in the long view our contemporary world is made complete by the rich weight of years and of lives bearing down at the back of it. The pageant offers, then, a world which has escaped the narrow cell of the moment into an organic kind of history, rather than

Ms. Zorn's 'world without time'.) On the second, physical, contemporaneous plane, the inhuman world conspires to make good the deficiencies of the human. Thus the swallows swoop in to complete the artist's picture, dancing to the jazz tune at the end. The sedate trees provide bälance, and 'prevented what was fluid from overflowing'. The cows moo at the right moment, and the shower of rain falls just as illusion fails and saves the day for Miss La Trobe, who reflects that 'Nature once more had taken her part' (p.134).

Thirdly there is the human plane, which subdivides into the social and the individual. The small village community is shown to function as an integrated whole as it responds to its festival. The Reverend Streatfield deduces from the pageant that

> "...we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole...Did I not perceive Mr. Hardcastle here....at one time a Viking? And in Lady Harridan...a Canterbury pilgrim? We act different parts; but are the same... Scraps, orts, and fragments! Surely, we should unite?" (p.142)

Mrs Swithin in her more mystical way hypothesizes that '"...we have other lives, I think, I hope... We live in others... We live in things."' (p.61) Politically naive but artistically convincing is the social unity-in-hierarchy where the common people of the village respect the gentry's right to be served first to tea, and the gentry in their turn provide the sandwiches and the lemonade for the feast. Even Albert, the idiot, acting the fool as part of he pageant, collecting money afterwards, is part of an integrated picture because the artist insists on showing him as such, so that the vicar reflects how 'His faith had room...for him too. He too...

is part of ourselves. But not a part we like to recognise...' (p.143) At a more personal and individual level too, the complimentarity and unity of apparently conflicting human traits is physically demonstrated by the coupling in love or friendship of unlikes: thus Mrs. Swithin, representing superstition, enthusiasm, faith, is linked in ancient affection with her brother Bart, apostle of reason, as is illustrated by their dialogue about the weather: '"It'll rain, I'm afraid. We can only pray,"' she added and fingered her crucifix. '"And provide umbrellas,"' said her brother. (p.29) Where in previous novels, as we have seen, Woolf capitalised on the energy provided by the quarrel between the masculine categorising, and the feminine synthesizing, instinct, in this book she insists from the first that they must work together: 'Nothing changed their affection; no argument; no fact; no truth. What he saw she didn't; what he saw she didn't - and so on, ad infinitum.' (p.30) Other apparent dualities are resolved in sexual love or platonic friendship. Mrs. Manresa the painted symbol of unabashed heterosexuality is linked to William Dodge, the shy, proud homosexual; despite their sexual ill-assortedness, drawn together by his poverty and artistic leanings, her wealth and generous imagination. Giles and Isa on the other hand are linked by sex. Giles the soldierly and direct represents action ('"...little boy, with blood on his boots"' p.88). Isa, staring in the mirror, rhyming in the garden, represents the inner life of poetry and dream and contemplation. They resolve their

tensions in the primal act of the sexual couple at the climax of the book: 'Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born.' (p.160) The vignette of their eventual coming together closes the book and simultaneously begins another art-work - Miss La Trobe has imagined staging just such a scene as this at the beginning of her next play. So the new life to be born is also a new work of art, and the unifying of Giles and Isa, as of all the other opposites, is seen as essential to the functioning of the creative imagination. Woolf schematically demonstrates through the pairings of the novel that wherever there is some fundamental charity or some real desire to come together, human beings can indeed, socially and as individuals, be 'members of one another', as the vicar shyly but accurately suggests (and it is surely a symptom of Woolf's own maturely charitable vision that she, as a life-long agnostic, can allow the Reverend Streatfield the role of summarising critic of the pageant.)

The immediate effect of all these demonstrations of unity, temporal, spatial and human, is certainly aesthetic rather than philosophical. At a deeper level however they lend substance to the portrait of the artist as unifier, and corroborate Woolf's claim that the proper function of art is to offer a broader and unifying vision. Aesthetic effect and philosophical assertion are inseparable. As we read the book we are struck by a kind of tenderness and mellowness unusual in Woolf's writing, something like the effect of the sunset light at the end of the pageant:

> Beauty was on them. Beauty revealed them. Was it the light that did it? - the tender, the fading, the uninquisitive but searching light of evening that reveals depths in water and makes even the red brick bungalow radiant? (p.144)

This is not just innocent light: in such a compressed book, whose methods are 'more quintessential than the others',[92] as Woolf said in her diary, nothing is purely aesthetic, nothing is pure scenery. The swallows contribute to the jazz rhythms, style is meaning, and the literal light reflects a stylistic and philosophical illumination. The most comprehensive level on which unity is asserted is that where every detail, every echo, every morsel of speech in the art-work is concentrated and placed to contribute to the meaning of the created whole, so that nothing seems to have evaded the net of significance and found its way on to the page simply by dint of casual contingency or narrative probability. Between the Acts asserts the unifying power of the artist by showing that for a brief time at least the artist can thwart with his own order the centrifugal, disordering forces of real life. This is so even when art portrays these very forces, as when Woolf brings the planes zooming ominously overhead to disrupt the vicar's speech: a word is cut in two but the planes are pinned to the page and the speech continues, so the form goes on, enriched and unbroken.

The form almost by definition cannot be broken, because it is already a succession of linked disjunctures and contrasts. Woolf has defined twentieth-century form as a matter of 'Scraps, orts, and fragments' (p.142). The audience of the pageant have to build up

a picture of themselves from a motley collection of mirrors, and the final glittering, shifting, embarrassing result is something very different from the stately portraits artists have offered to patrons of previous periods, as the earlier scenes of the pageant have shown. However the operative notion is in the end of building up, not breaking. At one level we are indeed 'The young, who...shiver into splinters the old vision; smash to atoms what was whole' (p.136): but at another level such a shattering is just part of a dialectic, and the greater unity of the pageant can contain the changes which the twentieth century brings to dramatic form. It is this tension between disintegration and a new unity, disruption and the truer overview which results, that provides the formal cohesiveness of Between the Acts. Many critics, as Ann Yanko Williamson remarks, never got beyond the superficial level of fragmentation, and thus saw like Leavis 'an extraordinary vacancy and pointlessness' or like D.S. Savage 'a disintegration of form expressing surrender of all significance to the accidental...'[93] They have failed to read the most important message of the book. After the dislocating mirrors, the symbolic music which brings the pageant to a close directly asserts a regained harmony:

> Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetised, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward...all comprehending; all enlisted.(pp.139-140)

A new formal synthesis of a revolutionary kind bridges the dramatic antitheses of twentieth-century life. The critic who like Leavis

fails to perceive the formal unity beyond the superficial fragmentation clearly cannot be expected to perceive that this frighteningly cubistic appearance is not just a matter of aesthetic experiment. Woolf wants form to be rhetoric and function, not icon. This is what underlies her criticism of Lubbock: 'Mr. Lubbock talks of form...as if something were interposed between us and the book as we know it...an alien substance...'[94] Woolf does not reject the prime importance of form, and indeed her own works increasingly asserted it: she merely rejects the idea of form as a self-validating symmetry which might alienate the reader from the living core of the book.

Later in the same essay she propounds an opposed theory of her own:

> ...when we speak of form we mean that certain emotions have been placed in the right relations to each other; then that the novelist is able to dispose these emotions and make them tell by methods which he inherits, bends to his purpose, models anew, or even invents for himself.[95]

If we substitute 'dramatist' for 'novelist', this describes exactly the procedures of Miss La Trobe, watching the audience anxiously to see if they are moved, making use of both inherited and experimental methods in her pageant to achieve the final communal moment of emotional catharsis. The episode where the actors hold up mirrors and fragments of mirrors to the audience, in order to show them their own selves as actors and participants in the pageant in their turn, is a bravura experiment, a formal coup de théâtre on the part of Miss La Trobe and behind her, Woolf.

Yet in the audience, Mrs. Manresa responds for the first time in the pageant with intense emotion: 'for an instant tears ravaged her powder' (p.140). In the same way, in the larger art-work which contains the smaller, the book closes with a maximally daring formal stroke, as realistic convention is abandoned entirely and Giles and Isa are shifted subtly on to the plane of the archetype, moving from their secure place in the book we have just finished reading and taking up positions centre-stage in a new art-work which is as yet a mere visionary idea. The shift is far more daring than anything up to that point in Between the Acts: even the adoption by Isa and William of poetic speech was achieved by slow degrees and with some apology to realistic convention (thus for example Isa had to explain her rhythms by saying "I wish the play didn't run in my head" (p.89). The end of Between the Acts makes no such apology. But it is not just audacious formal innovation, it is also intensely moving. The intellectually distancing effect which it has is not to be equated with emotional alienation: we merely become aware of longer perspectives on our dramatis personae, of Mrs. Swithin's prehistory and of the artistic impulse going back to the days when men 'raised great stones' (p.160). In this perspective each art-work is only the prelude to another (though in Woolf's case the chain was about to be broken by death). In the long view also the apparently trivial and domestic - a husband and wife rowing and making love - is seen to be of universal significance. It is not just the aesthetic sense but the heart which is moved, or rather those nerves

in the spine which produce the sensation thought by Nabokov to mark successful art - '...the tingle in the spine really tells you what the author felt and wished you to feel.'[96] Thus paradoxically the art-work asserting its own form can be the cunning accomplice of the artist claiming to be '"the slave of my audience"', the artist who above all wants to make men see and feel.

Having discussed Between the Acts as selfconscious art in a general sense we can turn to the explicit statements about art made through the portrait of Miss La Trobe and her pageant. Woolf's early mention of 'Poyntzet Hall' in her diary makes it clear that this overt level of literary debate was important to her original conception:

> Why not Poyntzet Hall: a centre: all literature discussed in connection with real little incongruous living humour and anything that comes into my head...we all life, all art, all waifs and strays...[97]

Literature and art are to be discussed, but it is to be done through the characters of the village world, who relate aesthetic questions to their own lives and opinions, rather than to any abstract critical canons. Issues are never raised without a real narrative context. Thus the demise of the book and the rise of more ephemeral forms of printed matter is foreshadowed through the casual reflections of Isa in the library, who is seen to be 'Book-shy...like the rest of her generation... For her generation the newspaper was a book' (p.26). The following newspaper story with its surreal humour and real violence seems to suggest the possibility that only journalism can deal with material so savage and contingent as twentieth-century

life. Yet Woolf refuses to accept this: her pageant with its insistence that the present is organically linked to the past is an implicit refutation of the time-scheme of journalism, 'the paper that obliterated the day before' (p.158). Equally unstrained is the discussion of visual art which centres around the two pictures hanging in the dining-room. One is the portrait of an ancestor with his horse Buster, and naturally attracts narrative speculation - 'He was a talk producer, that ancestor'. The other is an authentic work of art which draws attention to its own beauty and formal qualities before anything else, the picture of a lady who 'led the eye up, down, from the curve to the straight... into silence' (p.38). Old Bart in his slightly tipsy outburst echoes the puzzlement of many professional aestheticians who have noted that the French possess both more avant-garde artists and more articulate art-critics than the English.

> "Since you're interested in pictures," said Bartholomew, turning to the silent guest, "why, tell me, are we, as a race, so incurious, irresponsive, and insensitive" - the champagne had given him a flow of unusual three-decker words - "to that noble art?" (p.50)

Most of the discussion of literature however takes place in the context of the enactment of the pageant itself, through the internal mechanics of the script, the reactions of spectators to specific incidents and the reactions of the actors to what they are asked to do: also through Miss La Trobe's own reflections on the reception of her work of art.

In an inclusive sense the words and action of the pageant represent the core of what Woolf meant when she looked forward to

her book showing 'all literature discussed,'[98] for the pageant provides a succession of clever parodies of earlier literary styles and manners, the differences between the historical parts commenting as much on changing literary fashion as on changing social mores. Thus the Victorian picnic tableau with its leisurely use of naturalistic detail and its slow, stilted, comically elaborate conversation, about romantic love and marriage and religion and Home, is as much a tilt at Victorian literature - the 'gigantic sprawling books [which] still seem to reverberate the yawns and lamentations of their makers'[99] - as it is a criticism of Victorian values. However, the most interesting part of the pageant for our purposes is perhaps its treatment of the present day. Miss La Trobe's first attempt to deal with contemporary reality is a disaster. She tries to stage reality by an exact reduplication of it: for ten minutes the business of the pageant stops so that the instantaneous present, - swallows, cows, grass, the wind blowing, the audience shuffling and growing restive - can assert itself. But noone understands, the attempt fails: without the artist's shaping, directing presence the audience are unable to perceive what it is that is being presented to them. Unchecked by the artist's frame, 'Reality [is] too strong' (p.133), as Miss La Trobe notes, and starts to despair. Through this symbolic failure Woolf attacks that strand in modern aesthetics which tries to be more naturalistic than Naturalism by simply dispensing with all convention and all discipline, hoping that the truth will somehow shine artlessly through. Woolf believes in frames and conventions and disapproves of the artless. This kind of attempt

at realism-by-transcription stands condemned by its evident kinship with the equally naive and heavy-footed realism-by-catalogue of Wells and Bennett.

Miss La Trobe's next attempt at evoking the present and making the audience participants in the drama is far more successful, and pre-eminently a matter of mediation and artifice. This time she makes all the village children confront the audience with every shape and variety of mirror or other reflecting object, broken glass or lid, holding up these manifold bright surfaces to the alarmed spectators so that they see themselves on stage, vital participants in the action of the pageant. The image holds its own brilliantly at a simple narrative level as each of them shrinks away from his own fragmented image, shy of direct involvement, and Mrs. Manresa alone, whose whole life is conceived in terms of a staged work of art, has the perfect style and aplomb necessary to bend forward unafraid and repair her makeup in one of the mirrors (pp.136-138). Beyond the narrative level however the mirror scene raises important aesthetic issues. In this attempt to translate external reality into art Miss La Trobe succeeds because she has accepted the need for the intervention of a reflecting surface, or indeed a very special variety of reflecting surfaces. The motley array suggests the twentieth century's need for multiple images and multiple truths. Its shattered and variously angled overview makes us think of the shattered planes and plural perspective of the cubist painting which Bloomsbury had espoused. Truth is no longer a Victorian policeman, the image suggests, no longer single, simple and monolithic. What the spectator sees in art will

depend on how he looks, and where. Each person must look at a divergent range of possibilities and provisionally choose his own. The image is extremely interesting in terms of its position in the pageant's historical survey of artistic technique, but to understand its full significance as a key to twentieth-century aesthetics we must look to the art-work outside the pageant.

The mirror motif refers us back to Isa in the library, reflecting wryly on the insincere statement of a lady visitor that books were '"The mirror of the soul"'. It appears that in this case books are a tarnished mirror, for twentieth-century frivolity and philistinism have eroded the edges of the library, and Isa is 'Book-shy' (p.26). A new kind of mirror, then, perhaps Miss La Trobe's experimental gamut of mirrors which take art out of the library, is required. We also recall a very different mirror, the mirror of solitary, romantic contemplation in which Isa dreamily contemplates love and her chances of happiness (p.14). This settled mirror indicates the narrowness and stillness of Isa's feminine, instinctive vision compared to the wide-ranging robustness of Miss La Trobe's. Miss La Trobe can hold up not one but a score of mirrors to reality, and encloses in her vision the whole bustling and diverse social scene. Isa's mirror is the mirror of the Lady of Shalott: self-enclosed, she waits for 'the man in grey, the gentleman farmer' (p.83), the unknown knight who will pass on a great horse. Miss La Trobe's use of mirrors is other-oriented (she turns them away from herself), dynamic, energising, contemporary, anti-romantic in that she seeks to take her audience by surprise and

shake them with a version of themselves they cannot tailor to their own preconceptions. Isa in her boudoir mirror sees her own version of herself staring reassuringly back at her. In this careful counterpoint Woolf shows that the feminine sensibility, the feminine instinct for poetry and love, is not enough, though it has its genuine creative role to play, in a century as hard, busy, vital and complex as ours: it is essential that Miss La Trobe be in every sense androgynous. Woolf's early concept of the primacy of the feminine intuitive faculty is thus superseded by a tougher, more complicated one, which better fits the facts of an androgynous century. The robust originality with which Miss La Trobe's whole pageant, and not just the mirror scene, confronts life, is an extended demonstration of this.

There is another vital aspect of the pageant's depiction of twentieth-century art and the role of the artist which is achieved through the intersection of its script with external reality. Woolf studies the practical business of the pageant's staging by the villagers, and its effect upon the contemporary audience. This contextual approach to the art-work is a vital part of Woolf's concept of art in her last work. The problems of production and of audience reaction are the two areas where Miss La Trobe expends most of her imaginative energy. It is through them that we shall best approach at last the eccentric fictional artist. It is important to Woolf's asserted notion of the virtues of impersonality (see my p.131) that as far as the villagers go - and the reader follows after them, curious about Miss La Trobe but frustrated -

'Very little was actually known about her' (p.52). She is mannish, possibly foreign, smokes and swears too much to be a lady, once had an affair with an actress, which failed, and is now alone. This we are told as hearsay and rumour among the villagers, not at something that Woolf is telling us authoritatively in the same way she sketches in facts about the other characters. When she speaks in her own voice, Woolf describes Miss La Trobe only in relation to her art. Her drama is the drama of the success or failure of the pageant, and afterwards, disappointment, acceptance, hope, all the mixed emotions which lead her to the conception of her next work. I have already discussed the significant pairings and interrelationships of the human figures in Between the Acts. In making Miss La Trobe, alone of all the central characters, friendless and unloved, Woolf seems to be making a deliberate statement about the solitary nature of the artistic vocation, the concentration needed to conceive the art-work and the solitude of the artist when the art-work is finally presented to the world. This is so even in the relatively fortunate case of Miss La Trobe, who has the distinction rare in twentieth-century art of staging an entertainment for a whole village, in which the whole village is willing to respond and take part. Someone has to organise them, and they tolerate her for her talent at 'getting things up': but then behind her back they call her '"Bossy"', and want only to 'put the blame on her' if anything goes wrong (p. 56). Ultimately, after the end of the play and before she begins another one, she is 'an outcast. Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind.' She belongs only when she is actively engaged in her production: then

only does she escape from 'the horror and the terror of being alone' (p. 155)[1]. The book shows her only when she has achieved her escape from the personal life into a social role, at once the slave of her audience and the organisational driving force behind her actors, the master of revels and the creature who is most powerless and vulnerable when illusion fails, panic seizes her and 'Blood seemed to pour from her shoes' (p.1[illegible]).

Because Miss La Trobe as a character is deliberately realised only in relation to the art which she has chosen as her life, we must return in search of her portrait to the pageant and its twofold encroachments on the external world, through the practical difficulties of its staging - actors and technicalities - and the complexities of its reception by the audience. Alone she hardly exists: her social function is everything. If we seek to find an individual complimentarity for her along the lines of the Giles-Isa, Bart-Cindy pairings, we arrive at a linkage only through art. There she may be said to compose a complex portrait-of-the-artist with several other characters. First there is Isa, the '"Abortive"' (p.23), introspective, secretive framer of rhymes, who hides her poetry away from her husband and the world in an Accounts Book. Isa seems to represent the rich but unvoiced creative imagination hidden in us all and voiced for us by the pageant. Second, there is Mrs Manresa, the 'wild child of nature' who personifies art as dramatic action, as charisma, as actress of men's 'unacted part' (p.116), 'for everybody felt, directly she spoke, "She's said it, she's done it, not I"' (p.41), adding with her voluptuous, brazen sense of style the finishing touch to the mirror scene of the pageant

by bending forward and adjusting her makeup in the glass. There is also the less glamorous but infinitely creative instinct in all those who take a generous part in the creation of everyday beauty, Mrs. Sands at her oven, Candish the butler arranging flowers, old Mrs. Chalmers taking pinks to her husband's grave. Miss La Trobe thus stands finally alone in every personal sense, but linked organically to each member of society who makes or dreams. She also has an even more direct functional link with those who act her play or respond to it, the actors and the audience, and we see these relationships from many angles as Woolf examines how the pageant is staged.

Through her close focus upon the problems of staging an art-work Woolf insists upon the practical difficulties of creating art, the technicalities and organisational problems which beset any artist who wishes to make public their private imaginings. She demonstrates the sheer hard work which is involved in the lot of the professional, and the toughness which is required of the artist when it comes to coping with the world's reaction to his offering, a toughness which for Miss La Trobe as for Virginia Woolf can never be equated with indifference (any reader of A Writer's Diary will see its author vividly reflected in Miss La Trobe agonising in the wings.) This emphasis upon the practical problems of art is entirely appropriate to an author who was also involved in publishing, printing, selling and reviewing in the way that Woolf was, and her decision to take us back-stage with Miss La Trobe makes a general point first of all: that the proportions

of inspiration, perspiration and pain are as mixed for the artist as they are for any other committed labourer. But a host of more specific insights into the concerns of working artists is also incorporated into Woolf's depiction of Miss La Trobe as the stager of illusion.

The naive actors' disbelief that a splendid effect can be achieved at a distance by gaudy dishcloths and silver foil makes the point that an eventual 'realistic' effect does not depend upon literal reproduction, thus reinforcing the lesson of Miss La Trobe's later failure when she tries to evoke reality just by letting the proceedings of the real natural world carry on without artistic interference. The effectiveness of blatant artifice is convincingly proved by the metamorphosis of Mrs. Clark of the village shop into a splendid Queen Elizabeth, when

> Sixpenny brooches glared like cats' eyes and tigers' eyes...her cape was made of cloth of silver - in fact swabs used to scour saucepans...(p.70)

It is a metaphorical statement of the fallacy of naive realism, the realism which seeks to achieve its ends by reproduction and by catalogue, against which Woolf inveighed in many of her best-known critical essays ('Phases of Fiction', 'Modern Fiction', 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown'.).[100] There she asserted what her creature Miss La Trobe was later literally to demonstrate: that with a stratagem of mere mimesis 'Life escapes', because there is an immense difference between an object and its imaginative effect upon the beholder. It is a far more subjective and stylised image that the artist must offer to entrance his reader, enclosed in the 'luminous halo' of

perception which sees silver foil as priceless ore if the distance and the lighting are right.[101]

Apart from the question of realism and illusion, the practical business of staging the pageant also gives Woolf a chance to raise the issue of the role of chance and contingency in art. Miss La Trobe has to contend with all the chance phenomena which are the natural result of putting on her play in the open air. The rain may come at the right or wrong moment, the wind may blow away the words of her chorus of villagers, swallows and cows will do as they think best. Yet on a wider level, in fact, the chance interruptions help to shape the organic whole: the shower of rain falls just in time to divert the audience from the failure of Miss La Trobe's '"ten mins. of present time"' (p.133), the real swallows dart 'Rather prettily' (p.123) across the simulated Victorian lake, and even the wind, we slowly come to realise, has a shaping rather than destructive effect upon the villagers' words, weaving its own measured lacunae into the song they sing as they interweave between the trees and between the different scenes of the play. Without the 'connecting words' (p.68) that the wind bears off, we get the effect of a kind of glancing, impressionistic poetry, and the rhymes and rhythms are the opposite of fortuitous:

> "To the shrine of the Saint...to the tomb...lovers... believers...we come..."(ibid)

Thus what presents itself to Miss La Trobe, the artist working directly in a fairly intractable physical context, as problematic, is seen on the subsuming plane of Woolf's enclosing art-work as entirely contributory to form and meaning. This assertion is

typically modernist: twentieth-century artists have been fascinated by the role chance could play in even the most shaped works of art, enjoying the challenge of random 'givens' which could then be seduced into meaning. This is the philosophy behind the Surrealists' use of objets trouvés, behind Max Ernest's love of frottage and collage, behind Marcel Duchamp waiting for the dust to make patterns on his famous Bride. Miss La Trobe is dealing with materials which are not entirely controllable, whatever the clipped instructions in her script: Woolf delicately points out that there is nothing more fertile in ideas than the contingent world, and gives it an honourable role in her entirely controlled containing art-work.

These are some of the sophisticated critical questions to which the selfconscious author subtly directs us through her portrait of Miss La Trobe organising the physical details of her production. The other side of Miss La Trobe, and the one which seems to define the essentials of the artist as Woolf chooses to depict them at the end of her life, is that which relates to her audience and more widely her community, the audience of which she declares herself the slave. The two sides are of course closely connected insofar as both actors and audience are part of the community, the problems of staging depend upon the choice to present your work to the community, and actors and audience alike present the practical problems of being unpredictable and untidy. The role of the audience in the pageant bears some comparison with the role of the cows and the rain, but it is much more extensive. What seem like interruptions into the action of the pageant, whispers and questions and comments

and laborious readings of the programme, in fact supply linking narrative information and critical hints which would have been deeply tedious if expressed at length through the actual language of the pageant. The dutiful local reporter, who has come along to note down the facts for his paper, adds his contribution to our understanding of the scene. The passages of fragmentary conversation gleaned from the crowd between the acts voice many of the readers' own questions, and pre-empt, in some cases, incorrect response: thus at the end of the play we are given a clear direction away from imposing or demanding closed meanings from art as we eavesdrop on the dispersing crowd:

> "And if we're left asking questions, isn't it a failure, as a play?...Or was that, perhaps, what she meant?... that if we don't jump to conclusions, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same?" (p.147)

Woolf in her longing for complex whole meanings makes an early statement of the twentieth-century notion of the plural meaning of the text. The audience with its vast diversity of character and opinion offers a multiplicity of perspective upon the action of the pageant, and these become part of the whole work of art.

There is also more direct audience participation at the end of the pageant. The mirror scene, where the audience are brought wholesale and willy-nilly on stage through their chaotic mirror images, demonstrates the thesis that the audience cannot be passive spectators only, but must be actively involved with the artist in the creation of art. They must be prepared to literally 'see themselves' in the art-work if they are to benefit fully from the

experience (pp.136-138). This is very close to Woolf's own point of view in the essay 'How Should One Read a Book?' where she suggests that the reader should 'try and become...[the author]. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice'.[102] She wants her reader to be an active companion, not a docile listener. At the end of 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' she reminds her audience of their 'duties and responsibilities...as partners in this business of writing books' and goes on to suggest that, if readers were bolder about asserting their ideas of reality and rejecting tired fictional coinages, the artists in their turn would be forced to work harder to get at the truth of things.[103] This is exactly what happens in Between the Acts when in the middle of the sentimental dénouement of Valentine and Flavinda's parodied passion, one of the audience cries

> ' "All that fuss about nothing!" '

And Miss La Trobe behind her tree 'glowed with glory' (p.106) because the voice has pierced to the truth of things, that the artist is parodying a tired convention, and showing how the sentiment and artifice of the eighteenth century are inappropriate to the robuster, rougher facts of life today. Bart sees from the first that as the audience they have a vital and active role in the production of the pageant:

> "Shan't we go and help?" said Mrs. Manresa. "Cut up bread and butter?" "No, no", said Mr. Oliver. "We are the audience." (p.53)

The audience, then, in twentieth-century art, will have great demands laid upon it: but in the resulting organic relationship

between artist and audience which Woolf asserts, it is the artist who must suffer most, the artists who must willingly risk death or glory in the wings as her work is presented to the world. We return to Miss La Trobe and her gallant declaration in the margin, '"I am the slave of my audience."' (p.155) For Miss La Trobe, her devotion to the audience is the single justification and reward for her life. The small amount of money which is raised from the production goes towards electric light for the church, not to the artist. She does not seek public glory, refusing to come forward to be thanked by the Reverend Streatfield. She is not liked. What she does have is the occasional moment of private and irradiating joy when she finds that one of her effects has worked, that her audience has understood her, that her message has been received: told by Mrs. Swithin that the play has made her feel she could have been Cleopatra, that Miss La Trobe has '"stirred in me my unacted part"', she reflects 'Cleopatra! Glory possessed her' (p.116) .. Miss La Trobe's single ambition for her art is to illuminate and to unite, and the successes are intermittent. Before the pageant begins, the audience are portrayed as locked together in their separatenesses, each secretly protesting at the existence of the group and chafing against it, Giles 'Staring, glaring', Isa feeling 'prisoned', Mrs. Manresa longing to go to sleep with a bag of sweets. 'We aren't free, each of them felt separately, to feel or think separately...We're too close; but not close enough.' (pp.57-58)

While the pageant is on, though, they are drawn together in laughter and applause: then, in the interval, the music speaks for them, lamenting again and again 'Dispersed are we' (p.78): and at the end of the last act they must disperse again, but this time with some newly acquired insight on their lips that

> "we all act all parts...what we need is a centre. Something to bring us all together...did you feel when the shower fell, someone wept for us all?... Mr. Streatfield said: One spirit animates the whole..." (pp. 145-149)

Miss La Trobe has in a spiritual as well as a purely physical sense (old friends meeting in the intervals etc.) brought them together. And she has also, although spasmodically and incompletely, illuminated them, shared her vision: at the beginning of the first interval she allows herself one brief moment of self-congratulation before her certainty crumbles:

> ...still for one moment she held them together - the dispersing company. Hadn't she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony...for one moment...one moment.(p.79)

But her hold on glory is terribly slender, her potential for suffering immense - 'Her power had left her. Beads of perspiration broke on her forehead. Illusion had failed. "This is death," she murmured, "death."' (p.107) It is clear from Virginia Woolf's diaries and Leonard Woolf's account of his wife that she herself suffered in just such an acute way about the possible failure of her work, and Leonard points to the predictable connection between Virginia's bouts of illness and depression and the terrible stress imposed by the completion of each of her books.[104] The artist is the slave of her audience, and suffers terribly in their interests. Even at the end of the pageant,

whereas we who are reading the enclosing art-work are convinced by the reactions of the audience and the narrative dynamic of the whole that the pageant has been a success, and achieved at least for its duration its aim of unifying the little community, Miss La Trobe has no such certainty; 'If they had understood her meaning; if they had known their parts;... - it would have been a better gift. Now it had gone to join the others. "A failure", she groaned...' (p.153) All she has left is the determination to go on, once again to run the gauntlet of failure with a new art-work, and as she sits with her solitary drink in the pub this consolation does come to her with the germ of an idea for the next pageant: 'The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud.' (p.155) The only totally reliable pleasure for the artist is the continued exercise of his artistic imagination, since the comprehension and appreciation of the audience cannot be guaranteed.

Miss La Trobe in her pre-war village nevertheless enjoys a relatively privileged position, for she can rely upon the villagers participating in her work of art, and the gentry coming to watch it. She has a recognised role of a kind in her community, and she herself tells us how 'the earth-coloured jackets...upheld her...' (ibid). If Virginia Woolf meant Miss La Trobe's organic relationship with her community to serve as a hopeful prediction for the artist of the future, she seems to have been proved wrong. The reader feels however that Woolf is deliberately formulating a kind of utopia rather than engaging in prophecy or sentimentalising an

existing situation. Even in this utopia, the planes zoom overhead, the girl is raped by soldiers, the snake and the toad choke each other to death in a dead-lock of hatred, the books in the library lie largely unread, and Mrs. Chalmers the decent widow, making her own private creative show with flowers, strikes a sour note by cutting the artist dead at the end of the book. This is a utopia which has begun to tremble for its own continuity. The soldier in Giles is impatient with pageants and poetry, aware of the threat of war and the real world pressing inwards: he already has blood on his boots. It is these hints of an ending, these echoes of brutal discord just off the page, which preserve the book from the accusation of being escapist. It is true that Woolf has chosen to portray a kind of ideal, the ideal of the small integrated community where all are aware of each other and aware of their shared traditions: but she sets this ideal precariously against the background of violent change which may be about to engulf it. It is perhaps precisely because of the preceding brutal shock of the first world war and the premonitory shadows of the second that the 1930s formed such lucid and haunting images of social health. Like the rather similar organic community theorised upon by F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson in Culture and Environment (1933), Woolf's picture of the village of Liskeard comes already framed in loss.

Though Woolf's utopia is thus a provisional and mythified thing, simply by asserting an organic link between the community and the artist speaking for it and with its help, it may seem an impossible

ideal to postwar readers. It is therefore as well to recall that her contemporary article on 'The Leaning Tower' (1940)[105] makes it clear that she was herself deeply worried by the problems of dissociation between artist and audience along class and educational lines. In her much earlier essay 'The Patron and the Crocus'[106] she had already expressed concern and perplexity about the modern writer's difficulties in finding an audience. By the end of the 1930s she was able in a moment of depression to envisage the situation as quite hopeless, writing in her diary that 'As war threatens the writing "I" has vanished. No audience. No echo. That's part of one's death...'[107] She saw all too well that 'the writing "I"'could not exist without an audience, and she felt the audience slipping away from her into general chaos. It is in the context of this frightened awareness that we must judge her courage and imagination in crystallising, in Between the Acts, her own personal ideal of the role of the artist, recognised and heard in his own community even if not loved or acclaimed.

Though Woolf is not indulging in general historical prophecy, she is perhaps making certain recommendations for the artist, tentatively suggesting a way ahead. Miss La Trobe is listened to because her art talks to the people and addresses itself to their needs. The themes of the pageant are both local and universal: she concentrates on the great issues, on love and hatred and historical change, on the audience's own ancestors, their own sense of social unity, finally on their own puzzled, dislocated, disparate individual selves, and suggests that these too can be seen as part

of some kind of transcending unity. Woolf in her turn standing behind Miss La Trobe is concerned in this last book to confront life directly and embrace it in its multiplicity, to reject once and for all the notion of herself as singer of the over-refined sensibility, lost in the mists of Bloomsbury's icy peaks. The clarity and simplicity of much of her statement in Between the Acts, the accessibility of her language, is the strongest proof of her own desire to relate directly to her audience, particularly cogent in the light of the book's temporal relationship to the gnomic obscurities of Finnegans Wake. Woolf wants art to be able to deal with life at every level, even those the cultured sensibility finds mysterious, like Sands' subterranean kitchen world (pp.34-37). She wants the artist to possess that kind of joyous realism which insists on seeing life whole, so that idiocy (Albert), sexual perversion (William Dodge and Miss La Trobe), vulgarity (Mrs. Manresa) are all part of a harmonious overview: as is the villagers' need for basic, unpoetic, practical things like a cess-pit and electric light, which must precede their need for art.

Such an embracing unity may only exist, the book suggests, within the confines of a limited world, and even then it is faced by gigantic threat from without. The relationship which Woolf longingly envisages between artist and society may already be a mirage or a metaphor, prone to collapse in the immediate future together with self-sufficient world of the small integrated community. Yet the book ends with one assertion of unassailable optimism, minimal yet built out of the solid rock which Mrs. Swithin's reading evokes. At the last, Woolf states her belief in

the continuance of the artistic impulse in the future because it is as old as the species itself. Her final page suggests that the creative impulse will continue rhythmically to recur as long as eros drives man to mate with woman and the race to raise great rocks upon the ground, to build cities and a social life (p.160). It is up to the artist to have the breadth and impersonality of vision to accept the responsibility which his gifts impose, to see art in this awesome context and therefore seek to communicate meaning, not reject it, to be part of the whole, not an isolated sensibility. The climax of the book is thus no personalised epiphany like those which end Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves, where individual sensibilities are irradiated by a culminating moment of vision. Between the Acts ends in a very different way, soberly indicating the beginning of something of universal importance, referring the reader back to an artistic tradition, to the artist, and the continuation of art beyond the last page, making a quiet statement of hope. In the face of the threatening planes Giles and Isa will make a new life: and for Miss La Trobe, 'words rose... wonderful words' (p.155).

Approaching the end of this study of the multiple meanings in Between the Acts it is as well to remember Woolf's own 'wonderful words'. Critics often deal more competently with lesser works than with greater ones. Agreeing as I do with Northrop Frye's judgement that Between the Acts is Woolf's 'most profound work,[108] it is easy to sigh (as more recent and more approving critics have) over the poor critical reception that the book first found.[109] It is

less pleasant to accept the inadequacy of one's own approving commentary. Where critical exegesis (and even worse, critical summary) runs the risk of making the larger issues confronted by Woolf sound portentous and banal, the delicacy of her own language and her glancing, elliptical narrative procedures mean that the reading of her text is an infinitely lighter and more colourful experience than my account suggests. Nevertheless it seems to me impossible to approach Between the Acts without evoking large issues, since the excellence of the work resides in its high ambitions. Any narrower reading is clearly disproportionate to the whole, however incidentally illuminating of the part. It is hopelessly reductive to say as James Hafley does that 'Between the Acts...is first and foremost a novel about free will',[110] or like Stephen P. Fox to realign the many complex patterns of imagery so that the fish pond is the book's 'symbolic centre'.[111] Between the Acts does not centre around the fish pond, nor around free will: it is a deft and fearless assault on all the great abstractions, Life, Death, Love, Art, History, Modernity, Tradition. The flatness of such a summarising critical statement should throw into relief the vital originality of Woolf's very different mode of expression, the real wonder of her words behind Miss La Trobe's. Even if there were not so much that is affirmative in the tangled weave of human life that the book depicts, even if art were not shownto be redemptive for Miss La Trobe and her fictional audience, the sheer demonstration of artistic skill should militate against a pessimistic reading of the book. Only by ignoring multiplicity of meaning and verbal texture and training his scholarly eye selectively on the

text's recognition of human mortality, loneliness and doubt could Don Summerhayes find himself oppressed by the 'special aura of gloom pervading the novel...'[112] The lesson embodied in critical response to Between the Acts seems to be that there are many areas where artists can pierce furtherand more finely through creative intuition than critics can through linear analysis - a welcome lesson in a century where critics are on the whole a healthier-looking species than writers. However, Woolf in her chosen role as unifier would hardly welcome an attempt to polarise the functions of critic and creator, especially when she herself lived a double life as professional critic and professional creator, and combined the two functions as the first critically selfconscious artist of my study.

In Between the Acts Woolf is pre-eminently critic and creator both. She manages to encapsulate in one of her slimmest and tightest creative works an enormously diverse body of critical debate about art. She also fulfils very precisely the specific ambitions she expressed in two important critical essays, 'Phases of Fiction' (1929)[113] and 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' (1927).[114] This returns us to this chapter's initial description of Woolf as an artist-critic, a thinker who could articulate as a critic the problems around which she built her creative works. The first essay is the better known and more frequently quoted.

> The novel, it is agreed, can follow life; it can amass details. But can it also select? Can it symbolise? Can it give us an epitome as well as an inventory?[115]

In Between the Acts Woolf is forced to push symbolism and selection

to their furthest extreme in order to deal with all the material she wants to suggest within its narrow compass. Instead of following the lives and amassing the details of her characters, she distills their speech into a few fragments of poetry and their physical selves into a few vivid glimpsed images. Yet the whole creation is far nearer to life itself as the twentieth century understands it - 'an incessant shower of innumerable atoms'[116] - than the dutiful inventory of facts she supplies in her previous and much more traditional book, The Years (1937). Through extreme artifice she gives us the world in a tiny paperweight, but when we look inside it each part glows, becomes significant, expands into something co-extensive with our fears and dreams. Between the Acts demonstrates what the essay suggests, that the novelist must be prepared to become more of a poet, to concentrate his language, to deal with essence as happily as surface.

In 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' she sets out by deploring the formal limitations of contemporary fiction and speculates upon the directions it might take. Her speculation is pointedly relevant to what she finally achieved in Between the Acts, over a decade of painstaking experiment later.

> ...in ten or fifteen years' time prose will be used for purposes for which prose has never been used before... It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry...It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted...It will give, as poetry does, the outline rather than the detail. It will make little use of the marvellous fact-recording power, which is one of the attributes of fiction...it will express the feeling and ideas of the characters closely and vividly, but from a different angle. It will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only...

people's relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relationship of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude. For under the dominion of the novel we have scrutinised one part of the mind closely and left another unexplored. We have come to forget that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions towards such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death and fate; we forget that we spend much time sleeping, dreaming, thinking, reading, alone; we are not entirely occupied in personal relations; all our energies are not absorbed in making our livings...we long sometimes to escape from the incessant, the remorseless analysis of falling into love and falling out of love...We long for some more impersonal relationship. We long for ideas, for dreams, for imaginations, for poetry ...It will give the relations of man to nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams.[117]

This passage seems worth quoting at such length because it shows how the selfconscious twentieth-century artist may inspect the problematic state of his art in his capacity of critic, and then sit down at the writing desk, many years later, and produce an imagined artefact which fits his own abstract speculations. Critical and creative functions work together. This is why critical selfconsciousness need not be an inhibiting thing for the creative artist. In no sense is Between the Acts an arid laboratory culture: it is the living, breathing, vital stuff of imaginative art. Nor does it show any sign of the etiolation which might result from its slow breeding in the solitary artistic conscience, dissatisfied with the state of the literary world outside: there is a kind of aerated, swooping quality about it which intoxicates, catches us up and bears us along. Insofar as this is true the work stands as a firm refutation of the accusation that selfconscious art must be per se devoid of spontaneity and therefore of warmth and conviction. It also refutes, in its passionate assertion of the importance of

the audience and the universality of the creative impulse, the linked accusation that selfconsciousness in the twentieth century leads inescapably to the ivory tower, and contempt for the crowd at the foot of it. Woolf wants the crowd to conspire with her, to make use of the unacted part of themselves, to share with the artist in celebrating what is beautiful, significant and enduring in human life.

For Woolf one of the highest goods in human life is the creation of art (a certainty whose resonance is only fully apparent when one compares it with Beckett's later view of art as compulsion and curse.) This certainty underlies the presentation of art as a dominant theme in all her major works, reaching a final maturity and complexity of conception in this last book. From the beginning she was the slave and not the mistress and mystifier of her audience, in that she brought the perplexed narrator, striving to arrive at the truth about life, on stage. By the end of her creative life she was able to serve her audience even better, to do more than show the dilemmas of an experimenatal artist trying to forge a new art. In Between the Acts she deals with art in its social and philosophical context, rather than the art-work in the process of creation, and the questions she formulates within its pages turn outwards on the world. Once again she brings the novelist on stage, and with the same revelatory instinct: but this time it is the portrait of an artist with a developed aesthetic and a developed philosophy of social relevance. In the early days of planning the novel, Woolf asked herself in her diary 'To whom at

the end shall there be an invocation?'[118] The eventual answer to her question proved to be 'Art', and the idea of art which we have by the end of the book includes us all, and our impulse towards creation.

In conceiving and creating a work like Between the Acts Woolf tried to blaze a trail along which the selfconscious novel might have developed in the direction of a closer and more direct relationship with a wider audience, and away from the concept of an art which speaks only to the initiate and the specialist. She showed selfconsciousness could be a way of opening out the secrets of the workshop to the public, and a technique for making her readers see that the 'self' of the writer represented all that was creative and unvoiced in their own selves. The beginning of the trail still blazes in concentrated beauty, but noone has been able to progress far along it. One answer, of course, lies in the black events which were shortly to unfold outside the pages of books. Woolf could include the planes and the hints of coming cataclysm in the art-work which contained the pageant, but she could do nothing to neutralise the agony and fear of the actual bombings which disrupted her life, any more than she could anticipate the atrocities which were to change artistic consciousness and make the bucolic idyll of Miss La Trobe look at first sight like mere gilded fantasy. She could include, within the frame of a text which is itself a great assertion of hope about life, disquieting rumours about the body of a lady drowned in the lily-pond, and dismiss them as uneasy fancy: but outside the book she could not predict or soften the

despair which led her to drown herself before its proofs were finally revised. The assertion of hope and unity stands, Woolf's portrait of the artist stands securely within what she has created: but Leonard Woolf's clipped note about his wife's death also stands at the beginning of the book to remind us that the twentieth century's best-laid plans and impassioned assaults on perfection tend to fall short in the fact of intractable reality, for 'she would probably have made a good many small corrections or revisions...'[119] There is perhaps some comfort in reflecting upon what Leonard Woolf tells us in his autobiography about Virginia's semi-mystical attitude to life after death. In this as in so much else not entirely part of the twentieth century, she was able to take comfort from a much older and more resonant tradition, and feel in a very personal sense that 'her mortality or immortality was a part of [her books'] mortality or immortality'.[120] For all the changes which the next four decades have affected in the status of art in the community and thus in the selfconscious artist, her books live on.

NOTES

Unless otherwise stated, all Woolf texts cited are published in the Penguin Modern Classics Series.

1. Between the Acts (1941): 1974 edition, p. 155. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

2. Molloy (Paris, 1951). In Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable, (also known as the Trilogy) 1960 edition, p. 147 (see also Beckett Bibliography).

3. Krapp's Last Tape (1958). Collected in Krapp's Last Tape and Embers, 1965 edition, pp. 9-20 (p.18). (See also Beckett Bibliography).

4. Scrutiny, September 1938, pp. 203-214. Collected in Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage, edited by R. Majumdar and A. McLaurin (1975) pp. 409-419 (p.409).

5. Observer, 20 July 1941, p. 3. Collected in Critical Heritage. p. 442.

6. A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf, edited by Leonard Woolf (1953),e.g. pp. 78-79 (entries for 14 June 1925 and 18 June 1925), pp. 106-107 (entries for 1 May, 5 May, 11 May 1927) and p. 282 (entry for 1 June 1937).

7. Leonard Woolf, Autobiography, 5 Vols., (1960-1969), Vol. IV, Downhill All The Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939 (1967), pp. 56-58, pp. 148-149, pp. 151-152, and pp. 205-106.

8. He held the post from 1882 and supervised the first 26 volumes.

9. See e.g. Quentin Bell, Bloomsbury (1968), David Gadd, The Loving Friends: A Portrait of Bloomsbury (1974).

10. Downhill All the Way, p. 27.

11. Downhill All the Way, pp. 41-42.

12. 'The Artist and Politics', in Collected Essays, Vol. II, pp. 230-232 (p. 232). First published as 'Why Art Today Follows Politics', Daily Worker, 14 December 1936, p. 4.

13. Op.cit., pp. 231-232.

14. Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography, 2 Vols, (1972), Vol.II, Mrs. Woolf: 1912-1941: 1976 edition, p. 181.

15. 'Walter Sickert', in Collected Essays,Vol. II, pp. 233-244. First published as 'A Conversation about Art', Yale Review, New Series 24, (September 1934), pp. 52-65.

16. Quentin Bell, Biography,Vol. II, p. 174.

17. Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', Collected Essays,Vol.I, pp. 319-337, (p.334).

18. This journal is now in the process of being published in full in 5 volumes. (The Diary of Virginia Woolf, edited by Anne Olivier Bell (1977-)). Leonard Woolf says (Preface to A Writer's Diary, p. viii)that Virginia left 26 volumes. However Anne Olivier Bell counts the two volumes for 1918 separately and makes it 27, plus three which were not part of the main series, thus 30 in all (Editor's Preface to op.cit., p. viii).

19. Clearly demonstrated by the titles she chose for the two volumes of essays published in her lifetime, The Common Reader (1925) and The Common Reader: Second Series (1932).

20. 'On Re-reading Novels', Collected Essays, Vol. II p. 122-130. See my Chapter 1 (pp. 64-67) for a discussion of the Jamesian theory of form set out in Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction (1921).

21. Horizon (May 1941) pp. 313-316. Collected in Critical Heritage, pp. 429-431 (p. 431).

22. A Writer's Diary, p. 224.

23. Reviewing (1939). In Collected Essays, Vol. II, pp. 204-217.

24. In Collected Essays, Vol. II, pp. 162-181 (p. 164). First published in Folios of New Writing, edited by John Lehmann (Autumn 1940), pp. 11-33.

25. In D. H. Lawrence, Phoenix (1936), edited by Edward D. McDonald, pp. 533-538.

26. Op. cit., p. 535.

27. 'Life and the Novelist', in Collected Essays, Vol. II, pp. 131-136 (p. 131). First published in New York Herald Tribune, 7 November 1926, Section 7, Books, 1,6.

28. 'A Letter to a Young Poet', in Collected Essays, Vol.II, pp. 182-195 (p. 191). First published as A Letter to a Young Poet (separate title) 1932.

29. Dustjacket to Ada, 1969: also op. cit. p. 588.

30. See Strong Opinions (New York, 1973), p. 16.

31. In the Trilogy. See my Chapter 4, pp. 351-361.

32. In Collected Essays, Vol. II, pp.1-11 (p.5). First published in Yale Review, Vol. XVI, 1 (October 1926) pp. 32-44.

33. 'Henry James', Part III, in Collected Essays, Vol.I, pp. 277-285 (p.285). First published as 'The Letters of Henry James', Review, TLS (8 April 1920), pp. 217-218.

34. The Voyage Out (1915), 1929 edition, p. 183 . All subsequent page references are to this edition.

35. See e.g. Quentin Bell, Bloomsbury, p.40.

36. Night and Day (1919), 1930 edition, p. 295.

37. Voyage Out, p. 266.

38. Night and Day, p. 40.

39. Voyage Out, p. 262.

40. Night and Day, p. 40.

41. 'Modern Fiction', in Collected Essays, Vol. II, pp. 103-110 (p.110). First published as 'Modern Novels', TLS (10 April 1919), pp. 189-190.

42. A Haunted House, and Other Stories, 1943 edition, p.7. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

43. Collected in Haunted House, pp. 43-52. First published in Virginia Woolf and L. S. Woolf, Two Stories (1917).

44. Collected in Haunted House, pp.34-42. First published (under own separate title) in 1919.

45. Collected in Haunted House, pp. 14-27. First published in Monday or Tuesday, 1921.

46. A Writer's Diary, p. 23 (entry for 26 January 1926).

47. Haunted House, pp. 44-45.

48. To the Lighthouse 19[illegible] edition, p. [illegible].

49. 'Modern Fiction', Collected Essays, Vol.II, p. 105. See also 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', passim.

50. Haunted House, pp. 49-50.

51. Haunted House, p. 17.

52. p. 26.

53. p. 27.

54. Haunted House, pp. 12-13.

55. Haunted House, pp. 34-35.

56. p. 36.

57. p. 37.

58. p. 38.

59. p. 39.

60. p. 40.

61. Ibid.

62. p. 41.

63. p. 42.

64. p. 39.

65. Collected Essays, Vol.II, p. 106.

66. Jacob's Room, 1922. 19 edition, pp. 1 -1 . All subsequent page references are to this edition.

67. Jacob's Room, p. .

68. In Modern Fiction Studies, Vol.XVIII, 3 (Autumn 1972), pp. 351-374.

69. p. 361.

70. Jacob's Room, p. .

71. Jacob's Room, p. .

72. 'On Re-reading Novels', Collected Essays,Vol. II, p.176.

73. Jacob's Room, p. ..

74. Jacob's Room, p. 1 .

75. Collected Essays, Vol. I, p. 333.

76. p. 332.

77. p. 319.

78. p. 325.

79. See David Gadd, p. 187.

80. Quoted in Quentin Bell, Bloomsbury, p. 78.

81. 'Is the Novel Decaying?', Cassell's Weekly (28 March 1923),p. 47. Collected in Arnold Bennett, Critical Heritage, pp. 112-114 (p.113).

82. 'The Georgian Novel and Mr. Robinson', Bookman (New York, July 1929), pp. 449-463. Collected in Critical Heritage, pp. 244-245 (p.245).

83. p.

84. p. .

85. 19 edition, p. . All subsequent page references are to this edition.

86. p. .

87. p.320

88. A Writer's Diary, p. 362.

89. Night and Day, p. 40.

90. In Modern Fiction Studies, Vol.II (1956), pp. 31-35.

91. p. 33.

92. A Writer's Diary, p. 359 (entry for 23 November 1940).

93. Quoted by Ann Yanko Williamson, 'A Principle of Unity in 'Between the Acts'' [sic], Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts, Vol.VIII, i (Winter 1966), pp. 53-63 (p. 53).

94. 'On Re-reading Novels', Collected Essays,Vol.II, p. 126.

95. p. 129.

96. Strong Opinions, p. 141.

97. A Writer's Diary, p. 289 (entry for 26 April 1938).

98. A Writer's Diary, loc.cit.

99. 'On Re-reading Novels', Collected Essays,Vol.II, p. 129.

100. 'Phases of Fiction', in Collected Essays, Vol.II, p. 56-102. First published in Bookman (April 1929, pp. 123-132: May 1929, pp. 269-279 : June 1929, pp. 404-412.

101. 'Modern Fiction', Collected Essays,Vol.II, pp. 105-106.

102. Collected Essays,Vol.II, p. 2.

103. Collected Essays, Vol.I, pp. 336-337.

104. See Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way, pp. 54-57.

105. See Note 24 to this Chapter.

106. In Collected Essays, Vol.II, pp. 149-152. First published in Nation and Athenaeum (12 April 1924) pp. 46-47.

107. A Writer's Diary, p. 336.

108. Anatomy of Criticism, p. 67.

109. e.g. Stephen P. Fox, 'The Fish Pond as Symbolic Centre in Between the Acts', Modern Fiction Studies, Vol.XVIII, 3 (Autumn 1972), pp. 467-474 (p. 468): James Naremore, 'The "Orts and Fragments" in Between the Acts', Ball State University Forum, Vol. XV,1 (Winter 1973), pp. 59-69 (p.59): Ann Yanko Williamson, op. cit.

110. Hafley, 'A Reading of "Between the Acts"' [sic], Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature, Vol.XIII, 3 (Summer 1953), pp. 178-187 (p. 178).

111. Loc.cit.

112. Summerhayes, 'Society, Morality, Analogy: Virginia Woolf's World Between the Acts', Modern Fiction Studies, Vol.IX, 4 (Winter 1963-1964), pp. 329-337 (p. 332).

113. See Note 100.

114. Collected Essays, Vol.II, pp. 218-229.

115. 'Phases of Fiction', Collected Essays, Vol.II, p. 102.

116. 'Modern Fiction', Collected Essays, Vol.II, p.106.

117. Collected Essays, Vol.II, pp. 224-226.

118. A Writer's Diary, p. 289 (entry for 26 April 1938).

119. 'Note' prefaced to Between the Acts, p.[1]

120. Downhill All the Way, pp. 205-206.

CHAPTER 3

VLADIMIR NABOKOV: A WELL-FURNISHED STUDIO

'...what I would welcome at the close of a book of mine is a sensation of its world receding in the distance and stopping somewhere there, suspended afar like a picture in a picture: The Artist's Studio by Van Bock.'

Interview with Alfred Appel, September 1966[1]

The life of Vladimir Nabokov has all the ingredients of high drama. It might indeed have been put to sensational use in the cinema he loved: a distinguished Russian family losing their millions and their beloved Russia itself in the Revolution, years of expatriate poverty in Berlin and Paris, then a remove to another continent, America, and the acquisition of another fabulous fortune through the hero's art, ending with a sunset framed by the alps above Montreux... cameos along the wayside including duels, the death of Nabokov's beloved father shielding his fellow-Kadet Miliukov from the bullet of an assassin, the death of a brother in a concentration camp, marriage to a beautiful woman, the composition of idiosyncratically brilliant chess problems and the classification of rare butterflies. It would be tempting therefore to expect from Nabokov the kind of portrait of the artist that actually shows the artist as adventurer - just as Ernest Hemingway with his highly-coloured life shows the artist as pugilist, lover, big-game-hunter and deep-sea-fisher. Yet this would be entirely wrong: and the comparison to Hemingway is significant, for Nabokov expressed considerable contempt

for Hemingway's realistic or rather photojournalistic aesthetic, 'something about bells, balls and bulls' (Strong Opinions, p.80).

Andrew Field, who wrote the first major book-length study of Nabokov, called it Nabokov: His Life in Art (1967). The implication in the title seems to be that the life of a writer like Nabokov is relevant to his readers primarily as seen through the prism of his art. Some ten years later Field published his second book on Nabokov: this time it was called Nabokov: His Life in Part (1977) and its intention was biographical in the traditional sense (though not the traditional style.) Nabokov would not give his approval to the biography and it emerges from the text that considerable antagonism was generated between the artist and his would-be Boswell, with Nabokov ultimately feeling that the image of his past which he himself had already crystallised in his autobiographical Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited[2] constituted 'a wholly sufficient factual account of his life'.[3] But Speak, Memory is not, whatever wonders it contains, a 'factual account' of a life: it is an intricately intertwined series of themes and images from Nabokov's storehouse of memory, and it is Art which determines the selection and the sequence, not Life with its two basic organising and disorganising principles, faithful chronology (doggedly linear) and skittish contingency (hopelessly random.) Neither of these two hounds have any part to play in the wide sunlit walks which transect, according to strict laws of aesthetic order, the formal park where an artist's memory speaks. The deliberate artificiality through which Nabokov insists on operating, even in the supposedly 'truthful' mode of autobiography,

emerges in Speak, Memory's subtitle, 'An Autobiography Revisited'. It is not a life which is being revisited, but a literary form, autobiography, and Nabokov's elegant and original bending of autobiographical convention is the real subject-matter of the book.

There is of course no clear distinction to be made between Life on the one hand and Art on the other: Nabokov hates such crass categories, calling himself 'an indivisible monist' (Strong Opinions, p. 124). He insists that 'The best part of a writer's biography is not the record of his adventures but the story of his style' Strong Opinionspp.154-155). Style and content, Life and Art are inextricably intermingled, and Art, in fact, has the upper hand: Nabokov's aesthetic is the child of the wider twentieth-century \ reaction against empiricism, the insistence that there is no unmediated reality, that consciousness creates the world because observation is always interpretation -

> I tend more and more to regard the objective existence of all events as a form of impure imagination - hence my inverted comments around 'reality.' Whatever the mind grasps, it does so with the assistance of creative fancy... (Strong Opinions, p.154)

With Nabokov, there is a persistent feeling that everything is at one remove - and then one more: if the reader strives to step across the gap, it is only to find that the mirror is reflected in another mirror, the picture is part of another picture. In the epigraph to this chapter Nabokov tells us that when we put down one of his novels we should have the sense of a completed art-work receding in the distance, one more canvas hanging in a room full of pictures by the same hand. More important, this 'studio' of which we are supposed to have a sense is not the 'real thing' but a painted studio - the

subject of another canvas, 'The Artist's Studio by Van Bock'. The artist portrays himself at work. Ah, then do we have a 'real artist'? No, because Van Bock, as a footnote is quick to point out, may be one step away from being an anagram of Nabokov, but the author uses other anagrams too - the example given is 'Vivian Darkbloom', but clearly he goes under many shifting guises.[4] The artist, then, is an artist even in his self-presentation, and we are never allowed to relax and think we have arrived at last at the solid bottom under all the false ones - there will always be another trick in the box.

There are two counterposed procedural points to be borne in mind when we consider Nabokov's selfconsciousness. First, there is no possibility of escaping the self and its own lynx-like awareness of self - 'The square root of I is I',[5] and rigorous mathematical procedures will only bring the analytic critic back to the same number. Second, there is no possibility of pinning down that self, trapping a single self among the harlequin series of selves, a 'real' 'sincere' self, the kind some critics like to befriend and domesticate. Andrew Field speaks of 'a lifelong character part' - 'The person he usually imitates at the Montreux-Palace is the way [Nabokov] puts it.'[6] It might seem reasonable to expect that in face-to-face interviews the 'real' Vladimir Nabokov would emerge: but Nabokov told one interviewer that 'what I really like about the better kind of public colloquy is the opportunity it affords me to construct in the presence of my audience the semblance of what I hope is a plausible and not altogether displeasing personality' (Strong Opinions, p.158). In Nabokov's work, we find selfconsciousness at its most evolved and

most reflexive, for Nabokov actually makes literary selfconsciousness, the donning of masks and modes, the fooling of crass critics, the (spiral, insoluble, self-perpetuating) riddle of identity, one of the overt subjects of his work.

But Nabokov is also artistically selfconscious in its widest sense. Like Woolf (though art has become, in the decades that separate them, a vastly different and more complicated machine) he is deeply and constantly involved with art in all its facets; in his case this means the role of art in mitigating pain and lost time, the relationship between the artist's patterns and the patterning sense apparent in the natural world, the function of criticism, the teaching of literature to the new mushroom growths of academic students, the problems of publishing and proof-reading, the possibility or otherwise of translation, the reputations and merits of his contemporaries and artistic forebears. Actual portraits of the artist are many and diverse enough to reflect all these concerns as well as to serve as counters in the all-subsuming game where selfconsciousness is itself discussed: a gallery of artistic rogues and failures, sentimentalists and mindless quasimodernists, serve as foils to the portraits of artists who share, and help to expound, Nabokov's own aesthetic. The only kind of artist-portraiture we shall never find in Nabokov is the kind of literal self-depiction in the confessional tradition which some critics have insisted on reading into his work (examples of false identifications along these lines have been made by two writers whose work Nabokov admires, by John Updike who had his knuckles rapped for confusing Ada's Van and Ada with Vladimir and his wife Vera,[7] and in more subtle and amusing vein by Alain Robbe-

Grillet, whose wife dressed up as a Lolita-style nymphet when the two writers met, and was offered a coca-cola by the waiter for her pains (Strong Opinions, p.174). It seems that Nabokov enjoys donating to his fictional creations this or that biographical detail from his private purse just as bait for 'a certain type of critic who ... keeps dotting all the i's with the author's head', as he wittily put it (Strong Opinions, p.18). He also enjoys occasionally poking up photographic likenesses of his own head above the horizon in walk-on parts or 'visits of inspection',[8] just to draw those critics' fire. But the head of the actual author, in Nabokov's case, is a great glass dome, curiously-fashioned, inhabited by every kind of fabulous and mythical creature, something infinitely too complicated to be used for the mundane purposes of 'i'-dotting - though it enjoys considerable success at idiotising its readers sometimes, and half the fun of Look At The Harlequins (1974) derives as we shall see from luring academic readers into false identifications. It is thus with extreme caution about the possible traps, the dizzying illusions of infinite recession, the learned and ingenious snares for those who pride themselves on their ingenuity and learning, the moral and immoral bait for the moralist, the false footnotes false-footing Field's loathesome 'PMLA-type people'[9] - that we embark on a survey of selfconsciousness in his work.

In my last chapter I chose to dwell most fully on Virginia Woolf's last work, which provided a kind of aerial overview and considered judgement on a life devoted to art. In the case of Nabokov I shall adopt a kindred strategy, with a necessary difference: Nabokov wrote three books with the feel of 'last books' - three books

which marshall all his resources of artistic experience, review and discuss his lifetime production, and deal with the approach to death and the special attitude to death of the artist. They are also all literally depictions of last books. Ada is the last work of aged Van Veen, its fictive author: if Transparent Things is synonymous with 'Tralatitions' as I shall suggest, it is Baron R.'s last novel: and Look At The Harlequins is the autobiographical memoir of the imaginary writer Vadim Vadimovich, and if the book's ambiguous last words, 'dying away', can be taken at their literal value, this also is a summary of a life at its end and a way of saying goodbye. The extreme individuation of style and technique between the three books is a measure of Nabokov's inventiveness: nevertheless, Ada (1969), Transparent Things (1972) and Look At The Harlequins! (1974) demonstrate over a span of five years a consistent and highly-evolved attitude towards selfconsciousness in art, and I shall consider this final statement in the light of some of Nabokov's earlier work. It should be said at once that Nabokov has only one novel that can actually be thought of as 'early', Mary (originally Mashenka, Berlin, 1926), his first book. Despite the massive physical fissure at the midpoint in Nabokov's production, when he changed from writing in Russian to writing in English, his work is stylistically and thematically a unified sequence. Mary stands rather outside insofar as it is primarily the record of human emotion, lucidly and naturalistically rendered. But his next book, King Queen Knave (1928), is an elaborate and cold-hearted game played with playing-card characters, and though subsequent works have warmer hearts and subtler ruses they are all without exception characterised by the same insistence upon artifice - the same insistence that they are designed

art-works, with their designer standing smiling in the wings - often letting his shadow fall on the stage, or coming on to play bit-parts, casually cloaked in an anagram. The very bulk of material over a productive life of half-a-century is a problem for a survey as short as this one must be, but before discussing the last three works in more depth I shall look briefly at some of the magician's earlier appearances in his work, and especially at the indicative example of King Queen Knave.

I have already said that Mary does not typify the Nabokovian mode of structured artifice. Nevertheless, this simple, elegant story of first love recalled and outgrown helps to indicate what is to come on the basis of opposites, as Nabokov's introduction to the 1970 translation suggests:

> The beginner's well-known propensity for obtruding upon his own privacy, by introducing himself...into his first novel, owes less to the attraction of a ready theme than to the relief of getting rid of oneself, before going on to better things...Readers of my Speak, Memory...cannot fail to notice certain similarities between my recollections and Ganin's. His Mary is a twin sister of my Tamara, the ancestral avenues are there...(op.cit., pp. xi-xii)

The affection Nabokov confesses to still feeling for Mary is 'sentimental' and based upon its heady 'extract of personal reality' (ibid): we shall not hear this note again in any of the other useful forewords which Nabokov has attached to the translations of his Russian novels (these forewords are themselves interesting examples of the self-conscious artist stepping forward to analyse his art with a sardonic confidence that seeks to pre-empt less competent critical discussion.) The key idea for my purposes in the introduction to Mary is that of 'getting rid of oneself, before going on to better things'. Nabokov gets rid of his desire to portray himself literally and faithfully,

to make art from the beats of the heart, through his description of the solitary young emigré Russian Ganin; after Mary self-portraiture becomes in the truest sense impersonal, the artist showing his readers how he works.

The portrayal of Ganin is touching and interesting in itself but throws only a sidelight on the artistic practice of his creator. This sidelight is Ganin's possession of Nabokov's own highly-developed faculty of memory, a memory which must help to account for the extraordinary crispness and immediacy of the textures through which his imagined worlds are made material. Nabokov appears to give memory primacy over the other mental faculties:

> I would say that imagination is a form of memory...An image depends on the power of association, and association is supplied and prompted by memory...both memory and imagination are a negation of time. (Strong Opinions, p.78)

Ganin is an artist of memory, and when he hears that Mary will be in town in six days' time, his evocation of the girl he had loved in Russia before the Revolution is so clear and so powerful that it is finally stronger than the offered actuality of meeting her again in the shiftless, history-less world of Berlin where the book's disparate collection of characters huddle together.'He was a god re-creating a world that had perished.' (Mary p. 33) But though Ganin has the memory of an artist, he does not have the literary skill: he does not write about his memories, that is left to his affectionate creator, drawing on his intoxicating store of 'personal reality'. The only actual artist in the book, Podtyagin, belongs to a simpler tradition, that of the artist-as-character. He provides a cameo of the old poet who has outlived his reputation, his money and his beloved native land - all good 'human interest' ingredients but not

essentially illuminating of poetic practice.

If we are to trace in Mary anything which is indicative of Nabokov's later vein of selfconsciousness it must come from a more diffuse source than his actual artist-portraiture. There is a certain stylish symmetry in the construction of the book which already suggests that we are being offered something more sophisticated and shaped than a mere imitation of life. The book opens with Ganin and a man who later turns out to be Mary's husband stuck in a lift which has broken down between floors in the dark. The image of frustration, randomness, suspension, waiting with no sure sense of delivery, mirrors the situation of all the Russian emigrés staying in the little pension: the symbolism is actually invoked by talkative Alfyorov (p.3), and Ganin's gloomily prosaic query - '"What's symbolic about it?"' - affords his author a deft ironic defence against the charge of heavy symbolism.[10] Another striking detail smacks still more strongly of artifice. There are six rooms in the pension and they are curiously labelled by torn-off sheets from a 'year-old' calendar (p.5), April 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. This seems like just a pleasingly eccentric mode of economy on the part of the landlady until we realise that the book's action takes place in spring and these emigrés pursue their pale dreams through 'the pale April streets' (p.18) of Berlin. They first sit down to eat on a Monday and the dénouement of the action, Mary's arrival, is promised for the Saturday. Only on Friday is it revealed by means of a dated party invitation that that day is April 6 (p.78). Working backwards, the answer must be that the six days of the book's action are April 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. The chronology of the book is thus casually inscribed on the interior of the building wherein most of its significant encounters take place. Moreover, the book's central

narrative joke, its revelation that dull Alfyorov's wife is the same person as Ganin's lost love, emerges in Alfyorov's room, which has 'April 1' on the door - an April Fool by authorial fate.[11] This kind of patterning would not have pleased a writer who only wanted to exercise an old love affair: the numbered doors draw attention to the selfconscious author who opens them, not the human drama inside.

Nevertheless, though these foreshadow the carefully dovetailed intricacies of Nabokov's later constructions, our overwhelming impression in reading Mary is of a series of strikingly precise vignettes of a young man's emotional life set against the rootless world of the emigration. We close the book feeling we have learned more about that world and more about the young Nabokov: but Van Bock's studio is still in the process of construction, as Nabokov later in effect pointed out. Despite the retrospective warmth for the work which he confesses in the introduction of 1970, he has also said that his next novel expressed an artistic need to move right away from the 'human humidity' which permeated Mary: the result is King Queen Knave, the 'gayest' of his novels and a 'bright brute' of a book.[12] King Queen Knave is not only about human automata, it is also itself very like an ingenious and steely-hearted machine, and as alien in tone and texture from the lyrical resonances of Woolf's Between the Acts as the decadent world of moneyed Berliners must have been from the besieged rural paradise of Woolf's villagers. However, the book cannot simply be understood through its personnel and Berlin context, for the complications of Nabokov's life-story and the complex efforts which he invests in his art mean that the definitive English text of 1968 with which the non-Russian-speaking critic will naturally deal

is not at all the same thing as the Russian second novel that was published in Berlin in 1928. Nabokov's 1967 foreword to this first English translation alerts us to the factor of revision but does not at all make clear its extent:

> 'I do not wish to spoil the pleasure of future collators by discussing the little changes I made. Let me only remark that my main purpose in making them was...to permit a still breathing body to enjoy certain innate capacities which inexperience and eagerness...had denied it formerly.'(p.vii)

Fortunately one such scholarly collator was not far in the future. Carl R. Proffer in his long and detailed article 'A New Deck for Nabokov's Knaves' exhaustively compared the Russian and English texts and decided that the 1968 translation 'is in effect a new novel'.[13] The many passages he compares make it clear that the changes are largely a matter of interpolation and addition: Proffer is more dogged collator than interpretative critic, offering a list rather than a reading, but what is interesting from our point of view is that a high proportion of the changes work towards exaggerating the artificial nature of the whole, stylising the images of the three principals and making the patterns of their manoeuvres reflect back from every plane in the fictional hall of mirrors. Proffer shows himself rather unreceptive to this kind of deliberate artificiality and uncomprehending of its purpose, which may account for his judgement that in the end the 1968 King Queen Knave is simply a different novel. Taking my alternative premise that Nabokov was centrally and consistently fascinated by the element of patterning in his books and their status as authored story, it seems more logical to accept Nabokov's own statement that he merely developed '...possibilities...' '...within the texture of the creature... [which] were practically crying to be developed or teased out' (Foreword, p.vii).

The love of artifice in the original Russian version of the text was very apparent to Andrew Field, writing in 1967 before the English version was published, and remarking on the early work's 'highly mannered form': 'one sees and feels the artist in the very act of manipulating his characters.'[14] It seems fair to state that the selfconscious nature of King Queen Knave was established from the moment when Nabokov first thought of telling that tale of a triangular love-affair under a title evoking three flat and stylised playing cards: and the title at least has not changed. Ultimately of course the 1968 text must be read as (in Nabokov's words) the 'definitive English version'[15] and appreciated as a single art-work in its own right, not subjected to archeological investigation, and I shall go on to examine selfconsciousness in King Queen Knave on that basis: but it is surprising that even a critic as recent and apparently scholarly as G.M. Hyde in Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist (1977) should write about the work as though only one version had ever existed.[16] Quite apart from what the mere fact of extensive recasting reveals about Nabokov's devotion to the form of his work, it is extremely interesting that four decades of artistic practice (and the decline of the early twentieth century's prevailing conventions of fictional realism) should have confirmed and intensified Nabokov's selfconsciousness in such a demonstrable way. However, Nabokov's is a very different artistic career from Woolf's, and the forty years of development from the first version of King Queen Knave to Ada are years of variation rather than linear maturation. It is perfectly appropriate that a writer whose aesthetic was as basically consistent as Nabokov's should have been working on Ada and the revision of King Queen Knave at the same time.

In his 1967 foreword he explains that he chose a cast of Germans rather than his own familiar Russians precisely because this ensured that the subject-matter of the book was far removed from his own experience, and consequently difficult to infect with autobiography or personal warmth:

> I spoke no German, had no German friends, had not read a single German novel...the lack of any emotional involvement and the fairytale freedom inherent in an unknown milieu answered my dream of pure invention.(p.vi)

We find (by one of the familiar paradoxes which help to define the particular kind of selfconsciousness which concerns this study) that a book from whose central substance all trace of personal self has been removed provides my first classic example of Nabokovian self-consciousness: here are in essence the procedures of the triptych of last books on which this chapter will primarily focus. Nabokov describes the plot as 'basically not unfamiliar' (p.viii). The plot is in fact a very old stereotype around which Nabokov plays, and so are the characters: a rich businessman, Dreyer, has a beautiful, bored, wife, Martha, who deceives him with his young but virile nephew, Franz. She instigates a plot to kill her husband and enjoy his millions with Franz: but Franz slowly begins to find both Martha and the idea of the murder repellent. In the event, before the attempt can take place Martha catches a fever and dies, to Dreyer's desolation and Franz's infinite relief. The crude sexual heat of Franz's feelings for his first love, greedy Martha, is a complete inversion of Ganin's moon-bright sentiments for <u>his</u> first love, Mary. Though all the three main characters are described with a savagely minute eye for physical detail - Franz's 'ears were of a translucent red in the sun, and tiny drops of sweat gemmed his innocent forehead right at the roots of his short dark hair' (p.26) - they are essentially

as the title suggests manipulated playing cards in a narrative game. Only Dreyer, the cuckolded husband, has any warmth or originality about him. Although he is a successful businessman he also has a sense of himself as an artist manqué, and a real ability to perceive beauty and oddity in the phenomenal world:

> ...everything around, those sparkling puddles - why do bakers wear rubbers without socks, I don't know - but every day, every instant all this around me laughs, gleams, begs to be looked at, to be loved...(p.176)

But his flashes of perception are quite wasted in a world where everyone thinks his questions mad, and noone laughs or loves. Dreyer's artistic sense is in any case ultimately abortive, as we shall see, because his consciousness has been formed in a world of dummies and automata, loveless imitations of men who are programmed to act like machines.

The theme of dummies recurs again and again throughout the book. When she first contemplates seducing Franz, Martha sees him as a doll she can make use of for her own ends, '"warm, healthy young wax that one can manipulate and mould till its shape suits your pleasure."' (p.31) She likes dolls, and keeps a rag doll by her bed (p.40). Dreyer returns home unexpectedly from a ski-ing holiday which has given Martha and Franz ample time to plot his demise, and they have mentally already reduced him to an automaton, the object of their desires - 'With stunning unexpectedness, the corpse had returned out of nowhere, had walked in like an animated snowman, had begun talking as if he were alive.' (p.161) Martha has more success with Franz, who lacks Dreyer's machine-thwarting capacity for surprises: she turns him into a sexual machine, 'an eternal piston rod in a vacuum of delight' (p.152). Dreyer's big department store,

where Franz works, is another rich source of dummy-imagery. Franz as a salesman not only has a lot of stage-business with actual display dummies, he also begins to turn into one himself, finding the everyday business of the shop 'a superficial trickle of repetitive events and sensations which touched him as little as if he was one of those figures of fashion with waxen or wooden faces in suits pressed by the iron of perfection, arrested in a state of colourful putrefaction on their temporary pedestals and platforms...' (pp.80-81). There are a number of dummies who are deformed or not quite human. A man on the train bringing Franz to Berlin has wig-like hair and a mask of a face, no nose and 'two sudden holes, black and asymmetrical' for nostrils (p.3). Later we see a film where 'a chimpanzee in degrading human clothes performed human actions degrading to an animal' (p.118). This is part of an evening's entertainment that Dreyer thinks 'a jolly good show', especially appreciating the trick cyclists (p.116) - that trick in which a human being, by extraordinarily precise gyrations, replaces one wheel and most of the frame of the standard machine. This aperçu into Dreyer's taste in art is the key to his final tragedy and the culminating irony of the dummy theme. Dreyer tries to express his yearning for something fresh and creative by investing his wealth in the project of an 'Inventor' (the capital is lent by Dreyer's sense of romance.) The project turns out to be the creation of almost life-like mechanised 'automannequins' distinguished by 'the flexibility of voskin - the very special stuff with which the Inventor had replaced live bones and live flesh' (p.193). Dreyer envisages his wonderful creatures stalking about astonishing passers-by in his shop windows - and this limited fantasy seems to him 'a poetical vision' (p.195). Vision then is a very relative

matter, and Dreyer for all his spark of erratic humanity cannot escape the mechanical narrowness of the culture which has bred him (the only escape the book offers is into the total solipsism of madness. Franz's landlard Enricht leads a secret life as the 'famed illusionist and conjuror Menetek-El-Pharsin' (p.99), sees himself as an artist who 'had created Franz with a few deft dabs of his facile fancy' (p.227), and when Franz gives up his room decides to abolish his artefact - 'Old Enricht came out from behind a screen. He was stark naked and had a paper fan in his hand. "You no longer exist, Franz Bubendorf," he said drily, indicating the door with his fan.' (p.229) Franz's real creator, Vladimir Nabokov, seems to have a certain sympathy for this fantastic artist in a world of robots - 'Such magicians should be made emperors.' (p.228)) Dreyer however has not the saving grace of madness and unlike Enricht, who has managed to create 'eight former lodgers, doctors, policemen, garbage collectors...' etc., can only hope to stage another man's inferior mechanical imitations. As a last bad joke the mechanical men turn out to be a risible failure, the 'Scandinavian type' lady turns out to resemble a female impersonator 'on slow roller skates' and the gentleman tries 'to remove his hat in a complicated, much too complicated, salute. Something crunched...the hat was doffed with a flourish but the arm came off too.' (pp. 262-263)

The playing-card imagery is clearly a variant upon the theme of automata. Martha and Franz are even allowed some half-consciousness of their status as counters in Nabokov's merciless game. Thus at a party they

> ...felt the existence of this invisible geometric figure; they were two points moving through it, and the interrelation

> between those two points could be plotted at any given moment; and though they seemed to move independently they were nonetheless securely bound by the invisible, inexorable lines of that figure.(p.143)

These 'inexorable lines' slowly grow clearer and clearer as they begin to converge upon the finale of the plot. In the background against which the three royal cards stand out, there is an interesting metacomment on their drama, and one which belongs exclusively to Nabokov's 1968 reworking of the book. It is perhaps the single device which points most unequivocally to the status of the whole as artifice, to the triangular operations of love as a field where artists in every medium and every century play. In the 1968 text, Dreyer remembers having years ago seen a play called 'King, Queen, Knave' (p.172) and he mentions that the play is now being filmed. It later turns up as the first film that will be shown at the cinema which is being build near Franz's house. The advertisement for the film is already in place, and we find that 'the King wore a maroon dressing gown, the Knave a red turtleneck sweater, and the Queen a black bathing suit' (p.216) - all of which garments our three principals wear in the course of the action. In a move towards circularity typical of Nabokov's love of symmetry we find that the film is about to be premièred just as the book which represents its story is completing its 'geometric figure', leaving the art-work complete, ready if necessary to be transferred to another medium. Van Bock's studio clearly accepts calls from movie moguls (and it is significant that these passages were interpolated by the author after his own texts has begun to be translated to the screen.) Nabokov in fact capitalises artistically upon what might have seemed to be the book's major defect, the essential banality of the eternal

triangle, delighting in the fact that for all each character's vivid physical presence, from a god's eye view they are just predictable stereotypes in a familiar sexual hand of cards, easily transferable to the artistic productions of other designers precisely because they lack that 'human humidity' which makes human behaviour awkward, tender, unpredictable and unique. Driven by unreflective sexual passion, they are as much automata as the Inventor's grotesque toys, though their own more talented inventor has given them more efficient clockwork, more life-like externals.

Noting the introduction of the play and film version of King Queen Knave and the proliferation of playing-card imagery in the 1968 text, Proffer confesses that 'the purpose of these parallels remains unclear to me'.[17] In fact the mad replication of images of men as three-dimensional dummies or two-dimensional playing-cards is strictly functional, operating on more than one level. From a strictly literary point of view as we have seen the dummy theme provides a constant metaphorical reminder that this is an unreal world. The names of more minor dolls are not even life-like: the effeminate swimming enthusiast who works with Franz is called 'Schwimmer' (p.78), Martha's heart specialist is called 'Dr. Hertz' (p.198). This deliberate unreality refers us ultimately to another order of 'reality' where a less predictable author exists. The photographer who fixes Dreyer's image on skis forever is called 'Vivian Badlook' (p.153): meanwhile his anagrammatic near-relative, Vladimir Nabokov, is busy fixing Dreyer's image for us in prose. As if the presence of a puppet-master were not apparent from the stiffness of the puppets, Nabokov makes more than one humorous 'visit of

inspection' (p.vi) under anagrams of his own name, Van Bock masquerading as Vivian Badlook or 'Blavdak Vinomori' (p.239). 'Vivian' or a foreign cousin of his may also be the later anonymous chap, an 'itinerant photographer' who walks down the beach with his camera, his own machine for ambushing the phenomenal world, 'yelling into the wind: "The artist is coming! The divinely favoured, der gottebegnadete artist is coming!"' (p.234) It sounds like an extravagant claim for a seaside photographer, and much more in Vladimir Nabokov's line: indeed the image wittily refers us back to Nabokov's own less noisy but equally determined insistence on the 'divinely favoured' artist's presence in his book. An elegant young couple also staying in the same resort look remarkably like the Nabokovs, as the introduction suggests (p.vi). When Franz passes them on his way to buy medicine for Martha he has the horrible sensation that

> they were discussing him, and even pronouncing his name... this damned happy foreigner hastening to the beach with his tanned, pale-haired, lovely companion, knew absolutely everything about his predicament...(p.259)

As indeed the author knows 'absolutely everything' about his characters' predicament in this clockwork world of his own devising, and he never lets the reader forget it.

Artistically his procedures are their own validation, offering again and again the pleasure of well-oiled and interconnecting parts, the precise dialogue of weight and counterweight. This formal game is the primary reason for the incidence of dummies, cardboard characters, mechanical role-playing and impersonation. The game does not exist in a literary or historical vacuum, however. Its three central characters are not only made of clockwork, they are

also essentially made of words: as fictional adulterers they exist within a long history of literary stereotypes. In his foreword Nabokov refers us to the literary tradition which has influenced its production, confessing that he has 'been exposed since tender boyhood to Anna Karenin', and drawing our attention to his 'amiable little imitations of Madame Bovary'(p.viii). Inside the limited consciousnesses of his characters the same process occurs as they invent the scripts of their lives, though the cultural references are of a very different order: for example Martha's sterile mind plagiarises scenarios for Dreyer's murder from 'trashy novelettes' and in her description they have the slick unreality of certain 'American movies' (pp. 178-179). The selfconscious author knows that books, and all the inventions they contain, owe their inspiration partly to the inventor's awareness of other books, his situation in a certain cultural frame. Even more important, King Queen Knave relates in a quite specific sense to its own historical culture. Despite Nabokov's lofty refusal to recognise what he dismissively calls 'the influence of my epoch' on his art,[18] his books show him to be a singularly precise observer of the mores of his epoch. The rules by which King Queen Knave's automata regulate their clipped existences would not be so funny or so shocking if they did not relate to a strain of souless materialism in the operations of new money that we may all recognise. But the rules of this particular game also stand in significant counterpoint to the games played with real lives by less artistic dictators than Nabokov - real lives considered as so many animated corpses, as Dreyer's is by Martha and Franz. The invented material 'voskin' ('that very special stuff with which the Inventor had replaced live bones and live flesh', p.193)

may foreshadown the Nazis' replacement of more orthodox materials for lamp-shades with human skin, an infinitely more sinister yet related inversion of the real and artificial. In fact, King Queen Knave's mechanical world bears the oblique relationship of a fantasticated satire to the sensual, material and ultimately murderous society which was being bred in Germany during the late 1920s. Nabokov has frequently denied the existence of general ideas or socio-political comment in his work: it is a topic, like Freud-ianism, on which he grows rather shrill. Nevertheless, given that the relationship between art and the world which inspires it will always be oblique, it would seem hardly possible that those of Nabokov's works which radiate specific anger against totalitarian regimes (Bend Sinister, Invitation to a Beheading) could have been written without the author's personal observation of the effects of what he has described as

> the idiotic and despicable regimes that we all know and that have brushed against me in the course of my life: worlds of tyranny and torture, or Fascists and Bolshevists, or Philistine thinkers and jack-booted baboons.[19]

Later in the same introductory fanfare he talks about 'Nazist pseudo-efficiency'.[20] Pseudo-efficiency is the prescient keynote of the world of King Queen Knave with its lame automannequins, and the text contains a hint that Franz will die with worse crimes on his conscience than the attempted murder of his uncle (p.138), a pointer to the jack-booted future that Nabokov makes more explicit in Strong Opinions (p.296). The power and effectiveness of Nabokov's work resides precisely in the artist's ability to balance each structure's self-referring, centripetal stresses with a metaphorical relationship to external 'reality'. I leave that problematic entity in inverted comas in deference to Nabokov's own remarks on the subject, but I

mean that the world of the selfconscious fiction, however perfectly designed in itself, must also relate in a vital imaginative sense to the external world in which writer and reader must live, where men make money and make each other suffer and make some public account which they call history. I suggested in my Chapter 1 that critical selfconsciousness was far more than a literary-critical game illuminating the work's internal structures: it may also serve as a critique of the equally structured world outside the covers of the book. Despite Nabokov's dictum that 'there exist few things more tedious than a discussion of general ideas inflicted by author or reader upon a work of literature',[21] I shall risk at this point a little further discussion of the 'general ideas' behind my own study.

King Queen Knave's mechanical imagery has an important bearing on my hypothesis about how selfconsciousness relates to the crises of our own century. The invention and multiple insemination of Nazi man with his matchless genes and his mindless brutality towards supposed genetic inferiors was a feat comparable to the physical construction of an army of brutally dedicated robots in a factory. States have probably always functioned around their own myths, their own constructed fictions of what citizens should be and do to further a corporate end: but the twentieth-century state is larger, more centralised and infinitely better-organised in its methods of propaganda, changing men to fit the appropriate myth and coercing, suppressing or simply gassing those who do not fit the fiction. King Queen Knave's origins were very close to the rise of Nazi Germany, perhaps the century's single most powerful exponent of that insidious totalitarian trend, the mass promulgation of communal fictions posing as incontrovertible shared truths. The uncritical receptiveness with which men welcome any sufficiently powerful fiction

has been proved again and again from the days of nature gods to those of twentieth-century advertising. But the possibility of creating passive robots is relatively new: men changed by the chemistry of drugs, by psycho-surgery, by genetic engineering or by the infinitely potent mass hypnosis of intensive propaganda are a speciality of our own century, and all the resulting hominids have affinities with the actual machines replacing men in mechanised and computerised industry. Thus with a slight shift of perspective the very artificiality of King Queen Knave relates it integrally to trends in historical actuality. In this century we have effectively changed the material face of the globe, submerging it in a layer of human artefacts, and it seems at times all too feasible that the human animals who walk on the face of the globe may have their behaviour redesigned equally radically, their heterogenous human skin metaphorically replaced by the more useful 'flexibility of voskin' (p.193). There is a seeming incongruity of scale between such apocalyptic social visions and the effects of individual literary works: but it may be suggested at least that the cumulative effect of an oeuvre like Nabokov's, consistently alerting us to the presence of artifice in his own designed works and in the world outside it, may make us more aware of how fully our thoughts and lives are designed for us - and make us more capable than robots of defiantly asserting our own chosen designs.

However, the gravity of these hypotheses should not distract us from the essential gaiety and wit which characterises the artificer of King Queen Knave and which persists unquenched by the book's recurrent suggestions that there is real horror in the infection of

human world by mechanical calculation. One of the cleverest strokes in King Queen Knave is also one of the lightest and slyest in terms of its execution. The sleuth after selfconsciousness has a vertiginous trip to make in Chapter 5, which on close examination points out as Henry Fielding once did that it consists of 'Pages of Paper',[22] that it will be read and held in the hand and even laid casually aside. This is the chapter in which Martha and Franz first consummate their love, with an untypical lack of sexual explicitness on the part of the narrator: his observing eye tactfully takes off on a graceful swoop around the room after the manner of a discreetly swooping film camera. By the time it returns to the lovers they are slaked and still: and the last object on which the camera stays before rejoining Franz and Martha is 'a paperback novelette on the chest-of-drawers left open at Chapter Five [which had] skipped several pages'(p.98). The sleuth stops also, realising that his Chapter Five has just skipped several pages of explicit description, that he has stepped inside the picture in a picture, and Van Bock or Vivian Badlook is grinning wickedly to himself behind that camera.

The eleven major pictures (and many smaller ones, poems, stories and plays) which are hung in the studio between King Queen Knave and Ada are all warmer in feel than King Queen Knave, and many of their participants are more 'human', with something more flexible than that marvellous 'voskin' covering their bones, though we never again feel Mary's 'humidity'. The insistence upon artifice, however, though sometimes more subtly folded into the stuff of the book, is a constant, and a dazzling versatility is shown by Nabokov

in inventing new roles to play, new facets of the literary world to discuss, new authors to parody. A few schematised examples cannot hope to convey the intricacy of these glowing microcosms, but it may be instructive to sample the sheer range of Nabokov's imagination in full flight before we pass on to a consideration of the three points it chose as possible final resting place, Ada, Transparent Things and Look At The Harlequins.

The Defence (1930)[23] describes the life of a chess genius, Luzhin, and his eventual suicide when he sees he can never escape the chess obsession that is destroying him. The structure of the narrative is plotted in a series of chess moves as fate (or the authorial deity) pursues Luzhin to the point where his position is hopeless, and he takes '"The only way out...I have to drop out of the game."' (p.198). Meanwhile, in the black-and-white-squared background Luzhin's father, a sentimental novelist, is planning to write a romanticised version of the life of a chess genius, a book whose 'most festive hues' contrast sharply with the strict design of the real Nabokovian novel. Control is precisely what the tired old writer lacks: 'he had...to find a definite design, a sharp line.' (p.64) The answer he cannot find is the infernal discipline of chess, which supplies the structure of his author's highly formal work: to make life play chess is the achievement of a grandmaster of self-consciousness. Invitation to a Beheading ((1935)[24] evokes the condition of a man who is condemned to death by a world which seems to him to be a cardboard parody, a nightmare too risible to take seriously. At the same time he must take it seriously because he is in mortal fear and cannot wake up. His world is not so much

artificial as faked-up, and Nabokov constantly points to properties which are still half-painted or else already falling apart: at the end by a special act of authorical grace Nabokov does allow Cincinnatus to wake from his delusion, get up and walk away 'amidst the dust, and the falling things, and the flapping scenery...'[25] The book is not just a fantasy of extreme elegance, though it is that. Cincinnatus is a philosopher and an artist who feels he ought to be able to assert the power of his imagination quite simply to abolish the horribly mistaken world in which he has become trapped. Because that mistaken world is in fact the construction of Nabokov's imagination, he is finally granted the authority so to do: meanwhile all over Europe in the late 1930s men suffering in grotesque parody worlds were unable to wake up, as the book's first readers would have been painfully aware, and Invitation to a Beheading both focusses that 'real' nightmare and points to the artist's unparallelled freedom to invent alternative worlds where the just man's sense of 'rightness' has the last say.

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (1941),[26] Nabokov's first English novel, shows a Russian trying to trace the life of his dead half-brother, who was a famous and distinguished author (writing in English.) He is partly inspired in his task by a crass 'human interest' biography which has already hammed-up for popular consumption the delicate theatricals he is trying to understand. In his own researches he faithfully demonstrates the maxim later crystallised by Nabokov and already invoked by this chapter, to the effect that 'the best part of a writer's biography is not the record of his adventures but the story of his style'.[27] He tracks his

brother through the pages of his novels, and by the last page of the book he feels he has learned so much that 'Sebastian's mask clings to my face'. Our narrator is identified only once in the course of his painstaking labours, as 'V.':[28] the framing pattern of this most complex book seems to be that Russian V., very like Vladimir, in the course of those labours becomes Sebastian, an English-language author, a transformation very like Nabokov's at the time. Nabokov has written at more length about his change of language elsewhere,[29] but it is very like him to provide us with a sparkling metaphor for it in his fiction. Lolita (1955) for all that it gave a new word, 'nymphet', to American popular parlance, for all its massive sales and cinematic metamorphosis and the drastic change it effected in Nabokov's fortunes, is every bit as cerebral and esoteric in the structural games it plays, but this time the games are played around a golden little girl who seems to have dazzled the public into not noticing the difficulty. Humbert Humbert the narrator is not only a pederast, he is also a litterateur who parodies Eliot and makes constant references to Edgar Allen Poe: and he is first and foremost a passionately committed selfconscious artist, whose story is an attempt to preserve the hopelessly ephemeral beauty of twelve-year-old flesh in the enduring nets of art. It is a measure of the skill and seriousness of the artist behind the artist that, at the end of a book which has dealt with a topic fraught with the twin dangers of 'human humidity' and salaciousness, we really are thinking, like Humbert, 'of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art' (p.300). As one last schematic example, Pale Fire (1962), perhaps the most structurally ingenious of all Nabokov's books, takes on the

whole academic industry of text-and-footnote. The work is based upon the marriage between 'Pale Fire', the poem of a fictional poet, John Shade, and the scholarly aparatus of a fictional and also insane editor, Charles Kinbote. We soon realise his supposed editorial commentary is creating a whole mad world of its own with a fabulous lost kingdom, Zembla, and an exiled King who turns out to be none other than Kinbote himself. The marriage between poem and commentary is not random, however, because as the romance of Zembla blossoms from the footnotes we realise that the mad scholar's intervention has indeed supplied what Kinbote calls 'that special rich streak of magical madness' (p.296) which would otherwise have been missing from our reading of Shade's fine but essentially commonsensical poem. In effect the two texts provide a critical commentary on each other by their very nature, the critical commentary that Kinbote's overt efforts entirely fail to supply: and behind the two inventions, poem and notes, we can make out the shadow of an (equally invented, naturally) 'real life' relationship between the poet and his editor-to-be, conducted under the gently-parodied aegis of a modern university, to whose academic procedures and clubbable conventions mad Professor Kinbote poses such a glorious threat.

I have given resumés of five of the eleven novels Nabokov wrote between <u>King Queen Knave</u> and <u>Ada</u>, and since the other six are equally diverse it may seem astonishing that Nabokov had any tricks left in his box for even one 'last novel', let alone three. <u>Ada, or Ardor</u>: <u>A Family Chronicle</u> (1969) proves otherwise. In this book a 'family chronicle' is constructed before our eyes by its two central participants,

Van and Ada Veen, who are now in their nineties. The notion of a 'family chronicle' is at one level a heavily ironised reference to the scandalous nature of Van and Ada's love: officially cousins, they are in fact full sister and brother, the result of an adulterous liaison between dashing Demon Veen and his brother Dan's beautiful actress wife, Marina. The actual author, Van, discusses his progress, the mutations of his style and his literary models with the reader[30] while over his shoulder looks the other star of the drama, Ada, commenting acerbically or enthusiastically on his powers of recall or artistic prowess. The double time-scheme which establishes our sense of artifice in the first place is evoked by Van's easy transitions between the two: as he celebrates the burning ardours and arbours of extreme youth he refers us frequently forward to the much later period of the book's construction, the terrors of sleeplessness and pain in old age, and the countervailing bliss of his eventual reunion with Ada. The shadow of this later, 'real' time falls upon the shimmering texture of Ardis, the paradisal country estate where Van and Ada fell in love, and the echoes of construction work remind us that the scenes described are distanced, the product of a subsequent narrator's work. Not only the narrator is on stage to make this point about reconstruction. We are to understand that the book as finally laid before us has been typed by the delectable Violet Knox, Van's secretary, who appears in the book's last chapter, and edited by Ronald Oranger, a sympathetic publisher who also has a walk-on role in Part Five. Traces of their operations remain in the text in a few square-bracketed interjections by Oranger, one of which refers us to a third time-frame which was still in the unknown future for Van when he wrote of Violet 'Violet Knox [now

Mrs. Ronald Oranger. Ed.] came to live with us in 1957' (p.576).

Thus we are offered a solidly-documented and firmly distanced literary work, complete with a genealogy of the Veens at the front and a set of humorous and sometimes helpful notes at the back supplied by 'Vivian Darkbloom', Nabokov darkly blooming in the anagrammatic woods of selfconsciousness again.[31]

Van is a peculiarly self-aware and literary author. He comes from a richly-cultured background, and is presented as compendiously well-read and articulate at an age when ordinary children '"talked of croquet, and ponies, and puppies... and the next picnic, and - oh, millions of nice normal things"', as Marina complains (p.65). Van and Ada have both read Proust by the time they are ten (p.55) and here is a sample of their table-talk at the ages of fourteen and twelve respectively:

> 'By chance, this very morning', said Ada... 'our learned governess, who...is pretty hard on English-speaking transmongrelisers... drew my attention - my wavering attention - to some really gorgeous bloomers, as you call them, Van, in a Mr. Fowlie's soi-disant literal version - called 'sensitive' in a recent Elsian rave - sensitive! - of Mémoire, a poem by Rimbaud (which she fortunately - and farsightedly - made me learn by heart, though I suspect she prefers Musset and Coppée)' - '...les robes vertes et déteintes des fillettes ...' quoted Van triumphantly. (p.64)

Little wonder then that the mature Van has an encyclopaedic array of literary allusions at his disposal, and a brief description of these can only hope to deal with the tip of the iceberg, which brings us straight away to the punning invocation of Flaubert as 'Floeberg' (p.128). The blurb of the bookjacket (which is a parody blurb written by the author, rather than the kind of unintentional parody too often perpetrated by publishers) refers us to 'Count Tolstoy's reminiscences',

and though Van makes playful twentieth-century passes behind the backs of their narrative devices, it is indeed the great panoramic nineteenth-century novelists who inspire the book's sense of spacious grandeur, and the Romantic poets who set the tone of Van and Ada's 'passionate, hopeless, rapturous sunset love, with swallows darting beyond the stained window and that radiant shiver' (Strong Opinions, p.91). In a characteristically two-edged Nabokovian manoeuvre the author both indicates an aristocratic distance from his literary predecessors, 'the solemn novelists of former days who thought they could explain everything' (p.475), and also unashamedly creates a canvas or rather a series of canvasses with a nineteenth-century richness and roundness, a Dickensian sweep of characters, a love of the exotic as strong as Des Esseintes', and a central love-story every bit as dramatic as Emma Bovary's or Anna Karenin's - with the signal difference that this one has a happy ending. The dry touch of the parodist protects his creation against the accusations of being too lush: as young Van slily asserts for the benefit of the later Van who will record his judgment, '"Old storytelling devices may be parodied only by very great and inhuman artists"' (p.246). The reader is not allowed to read innocently and not notice the parodies: the book opens (p.3) with a deliberate mistranslation of the first sentence of Anna Karenin, but before the first paragraph is out we have been told that our book's first part will be, 'perhaps, closer to another Tolstoy work, Detstvo i Otrochestvo (Childhood and Fatherland...)' (another sly mistranslation, as Alfred Appel points out.[32]) These are jokes for literary scholars, not belly-laughers. Later on there are direct invocations to Tolstoy, familiarly known as Leo, and unsubtle references to other

writers (e.g. 'Sig Leymanski', or Kingsley Amis, p.340: a 'jolls joyce' car, p.473: 'Osberg', or Borges, p.344.) And just in case the reader should miss some quieter echo of another writer's style, Ada is in the background commenting on proceedings. Fortunately Ronald Oranger preserved all the work's scribbled marginalia: '(On fait <u>son grand Joyce</u> after doing one's <u>petit Proust</u>. In Ada's lovely hand.)' (p.169) There is no escape: Van nudges the reader towards an awareness of cultural context on every page, in nearly every paragraph. Moreover, the reader himself is part of a cultural context insofar as Van repeatedly invokes his audience and reminds us that a literary communication is going on: accordingly the reader and his possible modes of procedure becomes the butt of Van's wit. Very early in the book, after a high-spirited description of young Van walking on his hands, we find the following deliberately inappropriate and solemn interpolation, invoking by implication a drab reader with psychoanalytical inclinations, trying to swot up for even drabber exams:

> Questions for study and discussion:
> 1. Did <u>both</u> palms leave the ground when Van, while reversed, seemed actually to 'skip' on his hands?
> 2. Wan Van's adult incapacity to 'shrug' things off only physical or did it 'correspond' to some archetypal character of his 'undersoul'? (pp. 82-83)

Earlier still in the course of the book's difficult initial exegesis of knotted family trees, a paragraph opens with a superficially innocent intonation which turns out to be a typical Janus-faced jest about reader and author 'The modest narrator has to remind the <u>re</u>reader...' (p.19, my itals.) It is assumed that the reader will read the book more than once, a superficially immodest assumption that most serious modern artists tacitly make: Van both wryly emphasizes the arrogance and cloaks it in the parody tones of a

much earlier, humbler journeyman-writer assisting the gentleman reader in his august courses. Nabokov's own reader or rereader must clearly be a lover of literature in all its facets, as a museum and as an ongoing gymnastic operation, or nothing: unless, that is to say, he is content to skip from sensual setpiece to setpiece. But the reader who believes in negotiating all a book's pages will constantly have to bend in two to pick up the literary references which are scattered as prodigally through Ada's pages as Ada's diamonds were by jealous Van (p.189). Such a reader may well in some exhaustion require a justification for his efforts. At one level the endlessly ramifying literary games are part of the characterisation of Van, as I suggested before setting off on this tour, and Van is not Nabokov (as the latter has pointed out) but a fictional and sometimes truly 'detestable kinsman' (Strong Opinions p.120). However, the life-like evocation of an aristocratic sacré monstre and aesthete would not on its own be sufficient to defend Ada against the charge of wilful élitist obscurity - after all, why create a Van?

The first level of explanation is, I think a fairly straight-forward one and one shared by all Nabokov's other artist-portraits to a lesser degree. Van is informative: he is himself a pedagogue, who gives us a course of instruction in the history of the novel and a mini-thesis on the concept of time, and he is the representative of another teacher, Nabokov. He shares many of his prejudices, and admires the poetry of John Shade (p.542), Nabokov's invented poet from Pale Fire. Van is the spokesman for good art and an unerring detector of bad art and bad artists, creations which again are

erected and manipulated for the purpose of forming - or correcting - the reader's tastes: thus we have the governess, sentimental novelist Mlle. Larivière, one of whose honeyed works, 'Les Enfants Maudits' (p.288etc.), seems to be based on the love-affair so faithfully evoked by Van: and Kim Beauharnais, the blackmailing photographer whose sad dim photographic realism seems to Van such a reductive violation of the flash and fire of his and Ada's lovemaking (pp. 396-409). Van as writer also demonstrates for us the difficulties of an artist trying to rework the precious stuff of his own life into the tougher disciplines of art, providing an instructive counter-point to Nabokov's own much more distanced and partial procedures in Ada as he reissues odd but nonetheless recognisable portions of his personal past to the Veens - his old governess, his lepidoptery, his lost Russia, his contempt for modern art ('cubist mysticism', p.462), his hatred of free translation (the ill-fated 'R.G. Stonelower' (p.3) sounds like Robert Lowell, master of the 'version', lowering stones or dropping bricks).[33] More generally, Van makes us aware of the sheer emotional strain, metaphysical torment and physical labour of writing a book - he stages before our very eyes the realities of Ada's '"good definition...of the true artist"', to wit '"an habitually intoxicated labourer"' (p.134). The element of labour as this giant book marches on against the pattern of Van's increasing age and inability to sleep is clearly as great as the intoxication (and we remember that Nabokov was in his late sixties when he wrote Ada.)

Lastly, Van forces us to be constantly aware of our status and obligations as readers, as we have seen. Only the devout rereader could possibly pick up some of the references backwards and forwards over aeons of fictional time and many hundreds of the book's own pages: often too

the references are projected into the unread future, so only the rereader can hope to catch the special colour of the fleeting shadow cast. Thus Van teaches us from sheer necessity a certain kind of precise attention ('the readers are restless tonight', p.380) and an active method of reading and rereading, the method which is needed for all Nabokov's work but perhaps especially for his three last books. All this is informative, and much of it is fun, and these are good initial reasons for creating a Van. But the all-pervasiveness of cultural allusion and quotation in Van's book also serves a more specific and exciting end: the references web together to form a literal world, 'Antiterra', which Appel in the same article links to the traditions of science fiction. Actually 'art fiction' would be a better description, since the lines of latitude and longitude are generally lines of quoted prose or verse.

Ada is not set on earth but on this fabulous sister-planet, Antiterra, also known as Daemonia, an echoing, shimmering alternative reality where history lags decades behind our earth's in terms of literal chronology: yet there are modern cars, planes, films and an extremely imaginative telephone system, and children who are ten years old in 1870 have by some special dispensation already read the works of a much later author, Marcel Proust. It is the air of Antiterra (and not just the Veens' own highly refined breathing aparatuses) which is thick with the resonance of other men's books. Events in Antiterra proceed according to the patterns of novelistic invention in all its variety, and have nothing to do with terrestial logic. Most important, we are told that in Antiterra 'artists are the only gods' (p.408), and this is the clue to what

Antiterra represents. Ada reads like a metaphor and a parody of Nabokov's whole invented oeuvre, - the slightly monstrous, daring, carved and gilded artefact that Nabokov's art, in a grey century, seems to be. The Veens are his archetypal heroes, grotesque enough to be interesting, yet superrefined aesthetically, emotionally and intellectually, physically desirable and economically well-endowed. Ardis is the utopian citadel at the heart of art: there many ideals meet, the lost land of golden childhood which glimmers across the pages of all Nabokov's books, the lost state of grace, an erotic Eden with the lovers and their snake coiled blissfully inside it. Antiterra is something larger, the universe reinvented by the power of art, and therefore infinitely stranger than the universe we know, more opulent and more ingenious. Indeed, it can be viewed as the universe of art itself, and its atmosphere is therefore naturally literary cross-reference and allusion. Ironically, the inhabitants of nineteenth-century Antiterra (the literal chronology of Antiterra is of course determined by its dominant literary models, those of the nineteenth century) have heard the rumour that there is a Terra, a sister-world which is clearly our own earth, but are unwilling to believe in it, an ironic inversion of the situation outside the book where some earth-bound twentieth-century readers may feel unwilling to grant credence to the nineteenth-century splendours of Van's and Nabokov's world.

A reader of even mildly ascetic turn of mind is very likely to query the point of the whole extravagant invention of Antiterra and indeed Ada itself. Nabokov critics are frequently (like myself) devoted Nabokovians: they may therefore be quite content to offer approving

topographies, rather than interpretations or justifications, of territory which they simply assume to be major (this is the deliberate tactic of Appel, elucidating patterns and references in the indicatively-titled 'Ada described'.) Less lucid but equally enthusiastic critics like William Woodin Rowe follow a similar strategy: Rowe obsessively lists the puns, hints and deceptions, preferably the sexual ones, which make up Nabokov's Deceptive World, [34] according to his book of the same name - never indicating any unifying purpose behind all the tropes and tricks. However, asking fundamental questions can be dangerous, as is illustrated by the disastrous results obtained by a scholar like Bobbie Ann Mason in Nabokov's Garden when she stops doing some very detailed botanical investigation of Ada's plant-life and starts concluding that Antiterra represents that Demonian hell of incest and that Van as demon artificer robs Ada of her 'natural' female role.[35] Even worse is the moral debate and resulting strict reprimand delivered by Douglas Fowler: near the end of Reading Nabokov he declares that Nabokov's 'fidelity to his fantasies' makes him culpably uninterested in 'the moral burdens of middleground life or in money, marriage, institutions, commonsense psychology, technology fiction, and the like.'[36] All the same, to draw attention to the occasional crassness of such critics as do question the purpose of Nabokov's artifical world is not to deny the essential rightness of asking the question. If Ada is indeed a great novel and if selfconsciousness is not just self-indulgence as I would argue, then the work must offer a range of subtle answers to questions about the point of it all. To echo my earlier question about Van - why invent an Antiterra?

First, Antiterra protects Ardis - the 'Ardors and Arbors' of ideal romance (p.588). I have already quoted a passage from an interview Nabokov gave in 1966 when Ada was still only half-written and retained the clear lines of its initial conception, which its author states unequivocally as follows: 'Ada [is] about passionate, hopeless, rapturous sunset love, with swallows darting beyond the stained window and that radiant shiver' (Strong Opinions, p.91). Ada, in other words, is an epic love story - and the only one of Nabokov's books which centres around that most stereotyped of literary themes, passionate romantic love between two preternaturally attractive and gifted people (Lolita is of course also an epic love story, but is redeemed from any possibility of stereotyping by the aberrant nature of its two principals.) As Nabokov points out by his layer upon layer of literary allusions, the subject has been done to death and covered with dust by centuries of good and bad artists: and it must be said that in the twentieth century it is the bad artists, writers of trashy novels and makers of popular films, who have the monopoly over love stories, while the serious artists have chosen more recherché themes. If Nabokov is to deal with romantic love, he first has to deal with the dust, and he does so by delicately pointing to love's literary and historical shadow, which cannot dim his own original design: 'Then Van and Ada met in the passage, and would have kissed at some earlier stage of the Novel's Evolution in the History of Literature.' (p.96). These vivid and eccentric children however do not engage in that trite corridor kiss. An object may be obscured by dust because we have seen too much of it and are tired of looking at it, and it may also be deadened by the many old layers of paint which have covered it as generations of

artists added the embellishments peculiar to their age. Nabokov gives us a sample of each layer and then strips them off one by one in an elaborate attempt to defamiliarise a literary topic which has grown utterly familiar. What he says, in its simplest form, is 'You think you've heard this before, well I'll show you precisely what you've heard before, and then let us leave it behind us - hey presto, this is real, this is different.' And when he finally does stop echoing other artists' locutions and casting nets of protective irony about his own, the freshness and power of the vision which emerges is a validation of his convoluted methods. Here for example by some miracle mosquito bites become erotic.-

> ... Ada's unfortunate fingernails used to stay garnet-stained and after a particularly ecstatic, lost-to-the-world session of scratching, blood literally streamed down her shins...The girl's pale skin, so excitingly delicate to Van's eye, so vulnerable to the beast's needle, was, nevertheless, as strong as a stretch of Samarkand satin and withstood all self-flaying attempts whenever Ada, her dark eyes veiled as in the erotic trances Van had already begun to witness during their immoderate kissing, her lips parted, her large teeth lacquered with saliva, scraped with her five fingers the pink mounds caused by the rare insect's bite... rare and rapturous was the sight of my beloved trying to quench the lust of her precious skin, leaving at first pearly, then ruby, stripes along her enchanting leg and briefly attaining a drugged beatitude into which... the ferocity of the itch would rush with renewed strength. (p.107)

And here is a passage from very much later in the book, after the lovers have finally been reunited in old age, with a very different kind of solemnity and directness which is heightened by the everyday detail at the end:

> His love for Ada was a condition of being, a steady hum of happiness. He would have promptly plunged into boiling pitch to save her...Their life together responded antiphonally to their first summer in 1884. She never refused to help him achieve the more and more precious, because less and less frequent, gratification of a fully shared

> sunset. He saw reflected in her everything that his fastidious and fierce spirit sought in life. An overwhelming tenderness impelled him to kneel suddenly at her feet in dramatic, yet utterly sincere attitudes, puzzling to anyone who might enter with a vacuum cleaner. (p.574)

Or these deft poetic rhythms from the last section of the book, as the two Veens' voices mix and merge, prose narration transmutes by degrees into a kind of timeless and placeless prose-poetry, and reality recedes into its final state of preservation in the book's blurb (which also by a graceful Nabokovian circle constitutes the final paragraphs of Ada's text):

> By the way, who dies first?
> Ada. Van. Ada. Vaniada. Nobody. Each hoped to go first, so as to concede, by implication, a longer life to the other, and each wished to go last, in order to spare the other the anguish of worries, of widowhood...
> Actually, the question of mortal precedence has now hardly any importance. I mean, the hero and heroine should get so close to each other by the time the horror begins, so <u>organically</u> close, that they overlap, intergrade, interache, and even if Vaniada's end is described in the epilogue we, writers and readers, should be unable to make out (myopic, myopic) who exactly survives, Dava or Vada, Anda or Vanda. I had a schoolmate called Vanda. And <u>I</u> knew a girl called Adora, little thing in my last floramor. What makes me see that bit as the purest <u>sanglot</u> in the book? (p.584)

Here we find language to evoke love which is literary and artificial (in the sense of being far from naturalistic speech pattern) in the extreme: but it is Nabokov's own delicate, difficult, literary language, which he has evolved after carefully peeling off husk after husk of more familiar literary artifice from the subject of love. This then is the first function that Nabokov's construction of Antiterra performs: its shimmering, chattering, over-brilliant, over-clever, over-decorated, rococo textures protect and throw into relief the tender heart of the book, the dark veins in which the real current of time, love, grief, aging, flow. Antiterra protects

Ardis, gives back romantic love as a possible subject to serious twentieth-century literature:and that in itself is ambitious enough a motive for the creation of an artistic world. But I think a central meaning of the book lies outside Ardis, and relates utopia to the often dystopian world of what twentieth-century men know as reality.

In Ada, which he could reasonably have expected to be his last as well as his fattest book (as indeed it is the last and fattest book of his fictional narrator Van), Nabokov seems to me to be literally making his readers a gift. He offers us a mythically opulent and generous tapestry of a lost history - a land of culture and beauty, loyalty and understanding, genius and passion, an artistic world where such harmonious pairings of abstractions are the norm: where major aberrations have the grace of grand tragedy (Lucette's death) and minor ones the pleasure of a grotesque joke (Marina playing the cocotte in old age.) Everything is solid, detailed, rich: everything articulates into a tapestry of immensely intricate design, something which the reader feels must have been as many centuries in creation as the fictional family tree at the beginning of the book. In Ada, Nabokov offers us a world as a parting gift - a world which art has made more purposeful and more delightful than our own, a world with an immensely inventive peace-time technology ('dorophones', 'hydrograms', 'Sonorolas') and no technology of mass destruction, a world where the fierce, imaginative hyper-sensitive Veen clan are the natural aristocrats, and the institutions of dull states cannot touch them: a world which combines the leisured grandeur of upper-class life in imperial Russia with the cultural openness

and modernity of modern Europe and America. In this world, artists are truly 'the only gods': because Nabokov, god-like, has reinvented the world he knows so that the creative imagination enjoys primacy.

In an interview he gave in 1969, the year of Ada's publication, Nabokov was asked 'Which is the best [thing men do]?' His answer was 'To be kind, to be proud, to be fearless.' (Strong Opinions, p.152) The qualities are suggestive of an exclusively aesthetic world-view, and they are curiously inadequate to cope with the actuality of human life on earth: but in Antiterra, where the universe is controlled by an exclusively aesthetic creating principle, they can reign supreme. Nabokov is quite aware that men 'cheat' and 'torture' as he admits in the same interview, that his finest and most deserving characters are unlikely to be rewarded with worldly success: Pnin with his enormous heart and fine intellect is unloved by his beautiful wife and insufficiently valued by his university,[37] slow lovable Luzhin crashes through his bathroom window to his death,[38] nymphets fade and die before they can have nymphets of their own,[39] old poets like Podtyagin have heart attacks while grey officials haggle over passport formalities,[40] helpless children like David are hideously abused by mad totalitarian states.[41] It would be false to pretend otherwise: nevertheless what Nabokov actually shows us in Bend Sinister, in Invitation to a Beheading and above all in Ada is that art can imagine something different, a sphere where the beautiful do not go down in the mud and the morally splendid are allowed to enjoy their own radiance. The artist is more free than the ordinary man because, though he is also in his everyday life the victim of

contingency - injust regimes, critical indifference, age and death and the death of love - he has the perfect freedom of his own skull, the ability to invent alternative scenarios where his own chosen values are embodied in invented fact. Through these inventions he can attempt to persuade his readers of the validity of his own values and make them the present of a world which is more logical, more ethical, more beautiful than the chaos which surrounds us.

In Mary, Nabokov's first novel, we were shown that first love, however poignant and powerful, cannot last forever, that our actions are dictated by the external, sordid reality which is measured by the passage of time, not the glowing internal reality preserved by memory. In Ada, the first of Nabokov's last novels, we see demonstrated a love which survives separations of decades and continents, a love so strong that it reflects itself in the structure of the universe rather than being its victim, a love which is itself a work of art and which inspires another, the book that we read. Only a fool would pretend that this kind of love sets the pattern on earth, that wars never happen, that the gracious attributes of the aesthete can prevail over cruelty and death. As the narrator of Pnin insists, 'Harm is the norm. Doom should not jam' (p.25). Though Nabokov's own life has been 'harmonious and green', as he insists in Strong Opinions (p.45), he is aware that other humans are less lucky.[42]

It is clearly difficult to achieve a reconciliation between an awareness of the horrors embodied in modern history and a Nabokovian scheme of values (beauty, honour, love, courage - and the rich possibilities for happiness.) Nabokov achieves just this reconciliation

by an immensely elegant mental manoeuvre. He sometimes allows good to prevail - but in a strictly invented universe, a universe distanced by artistic selfconsciousness: he demonstrates that men can be happy - but can only be sure of it within the compass of benign fictions. Bend Sinister and Invitation to a Beheading centre upon the intolerable evil of totalitarian regimes: both were written in the shadow of a Europe disfigured by the Nazi horror - Europe which had once represented for the emigrés a haven from equal horrors on the other side of the positical spectrum in Russia. In life there was to be no happy ending. The emigrés never returned to Russia where their books were banned and their friends silenced or murdered, and Sergei, Nabokov's brother, never returned from the Nazi concentration camp in Hamburg where he died in 1945. In art, however, the miraculous escape can be achieved. The unbearable actuality that real camp dwellers could only liken to a nightmare is indeed revealed to be a nightmare, the dreamed horror of art, and at the end of both Nabokov's books the reader is encouraged to wake up, get up and walk away, shaken and grateful to be alive, reinforced in his sense of what is horrible about mass illusion, reinforced in his belief in the value of individual judgement, individual revolt. In life the individual tends to go under: in art his judgements can emerge with unshakable force, and his moral and intellectual triumph can be outwardly reflected in the image of a concrete victory he could never achieve in life. When the pain and horror of his son's death become too great for Krug in Bend Sinister to bear, the narrator intervenes to spare Krug by sending him mad, and that madness also lends him the invulnerability he will need for the lunatic act of heroism with which the narrative ends:

> It was at that moment, just after Krug had fallen through the bottom of a confused dream and sat up on the straw with a gasp - and just before his reality, his remembered hideous misfortune could pounce on him - it was then that I felt a pang of pity for Adam and slid towards him along an inclined beam of pale light - causing instantaneous madness, but at least saving him from the senseless agony of his logical fate. (p.210)

Through a deliberate insistence thatthis is art and not life and that different rules apply, Nabokov can draw conclusions rather more optimistic than history's. Martin in Glory walks into the picture on his wall,[43] Krug blunders out of a childhood nightmare into a calm summer night,[44] Cincinnatus gets up and walks away as the executioner's count reaches ten,[45] Van and Ada blur the edges of their shared pain as they melt into the prose of the book's blurb. In all these cases, Nabokov uses direct authorial intervention to legitimise conclusions more harmonious by far and more hopeful than the raw and painful blunders with which life so frequently concludes its blunders, or rather ceases with business unfinished. In fact Nabokov's selfconsciousness functions in a fashion diametrically opposed to that of Samuel Beckett, as we shall see in Chapter 4. Nabokovian selfconsciousness is a protective device for one of his unique talents, one which is worth insisting on because it chimes oddly with twentieth-century fashion - the ability to evoke radiant happiness, to proclaim, in the face of death and 'the boring or brutal ugliness of what not very happy people call "life"'[46] the inviolate importance of individual feeling and intelligence. The preservation of this flame in the potential immortality of art, Ada suggests, can do something to make up for what Nabokov has called 'the utter degradation, ridicule, and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence'.[47]

At the end of Ada, though Van and Ada continue untouched in their world of shared sunsets, the magic tapestry of Antiterra suddenly 'dwindled to a casual illusion', and people realised that their 'world was, in fact, mid-twentieth century. Terra convalesced after enduring the rack and the stake...' (p.582) The transition is simply stated, as an ironic pointer to the illusory quality of what has gone before, rather than felt in the remaining stuff of the book: a paragraph of a dozen or so lines reminds us that somewhere outside our golden book the rack and stake do indeed exist. A hasty reader would not even notice that he had been unobtrusively returned to his own century and history. But Transparent Things, Nabokov's next work (1972), opens in the twentieth century, and its narrow collection of pages stays strictly within the chilly compass of an unequivocally modern Terra, present-day earth at its harshest and least romantic, in every way the antithesis of Ardis. Most of the book's action takes place in Switzerland: but this is not the gracious Switzerland of Grand Hotels and leisurely walks by Lac Leman which the book's author himself favours. This Switzerland is the land of hotels, but their significance is that they are characterless, impersonal, temporary dwellings: these hotels are not of the first class, everything about their fitments is shoddy - and wherever one looks 'A lot of construction work was going on...' (p.37) The human figures, few in number after the huge sprawling dramatis personae of Ada, are as rootless, shapeless and largely loveless as their environment, with the exception of the colourful figure of a certain rich and famous old author, a 'great man' who 'wrote English considerably better than he spoke it' and had a 'luxuriant and bastard style' which was 'diabolically evocative'.[48] Baron R. turns out to bear a more than

passing resemblance to Nabokov, especially in the rather lordly and suspicious critical judgements which are passed on him: he is 'perhaps not a master of the very first rank' (p.24). The hero of the book, Hugh Person (the Hugh is mispronounced by his beautiful, mean-spirited love, Armande, 'You', to make up the significant appellation 'You Person', p.42), is much more a creature with whom the average reader can identify than were the legendary Veens. His antecedents are unglamorous, he is physically clumsy and unathletic, he has imagination and even a touch of genius but, unlike Van, he exercises them in the service of other men's talents - he works as a publisher's editor, and one of the authors whose proofs he reads is Baron R. On a journey to meet Baron R. for the first time he meets and falls in love with glossy young Armande Chamar, sexually desirable but silly in a peculiarly modern way. She is modishly and ignorantly radical, she is attracted to crack skiers and emotionally neutered sex, and her cultural views are a mindless mishmash of avant-garderie - 'She demanded hard realistic stuff reflecting our age. She liked books about Violencé and Oriental Wisdom' (p.26) - and she is due to attend 'the preview of a Lesbian drama with a Lesbian cast' (p.72) the day after she dies. Ruefully we remember Ada's fabulous culture. Her sex life with Person is an ironic inversion of the sunlight and nakedness of Ardis. In fact, Armande's clothes are one of the few protective layers of privacy and mystery resolutely retained by the book's 'ultramodern' contingent (p.53). She requires that Person should make love to her in the sitting-room, both fully-clothed, while they maintain an elegant flow of small talk, or else in bed while she talks to a friend on the phone: and she tries to conceal her pleasure. Too much selfconsciousness

in the sexual life clearly leads to a sad sterility.

The twentieth century seems to have done something terrible to all the pleasures of the flesh, substituting inferior artifices for the authentic original article. Even a simple thing like a cup of chocolate has fallen victim to a standardised plastic culture where everything is pre-planned and ready-measured. We remember with wonder the banquets of Antiterra, its creamy milk and vintage wines, as we read of Person's dismay on being served with a little envelope and a cup of hot milk: 'You added the beige dust it contained to the ruthlessly homogenised milk in your cup...no sugar could improve the insipid, sad, dishonest taste.' (p.47) On every side organic tradition, which provided thr rich sap and substance of Ada, has vanished. Ada was, for all its incestuous ironies, essentially a 'family chronicle': the family tree which serves it as a frontispiece is important for more than its deceptive implication that Van and Ada are just kissing cousins, it also establishes a secure sense that family links are enormously important, and the narrative with its central and tender bond between parents and children bears this out. In Transparent Things, on the other hand, Person, who is certainly the nicest person in the book, goes out and celebrates his (overestimated) newfound wealth on the very day of his father's death, and Armande's mother dies after her daughter has called her 'skotina', the rude Russian word for 'brute', over the telephone (p.63). Death itself is a subject which focusses the contrasts between the two books most clearly. In Transparent Things death plays a very different role from death in Ada because in a thin, transparent world there is no sense of fatness and superfluity, of a richness from which

things can be spared since the flow of life will continue without them. These people have no inheritors: nor is there any possibility of them evading death by a magnificent creative feat, as Van and Ada do. Armande is strangled by her husband, gentle Person, who loves her, in the middle of a senseless nightmare. The murder is dreamed, but the consequences for Person and Armande are horribly real: she lies dead on the floor of the bedroom when he wakes up, and he suffers what is for an anti-Freudian like Nabokov the worst fate of all - he is given over into the hands of psychoanalysts in 'an asylum for the criminally insane' (p.83). Death is commonplace and wretched, lacking the poetic logic of Lucette's or the bizarre genius of Dan's: the prose that renders the event is flawlessly elegant and detached but the fact that lurks behind it is brutal. Hugh's father dies in a clown-like tangle of trousers as he attempts to try on a bargain in a shabby shop. Baron R., our author, dies a lonely death in hospital after an unsuccessful operation on his liver. The lucid composure of the letter through which he speaks beyond the grave (pp. 82-84) does indeed suggest that the artist can in some sense outwit the witless but foolproof schemes of death in Transparent Things. Nevertheless the texture of the book receives the imprint of his death, and it is an unglamorous and believable one, as is the unsavoury chaos which, it is hinted, will overcome his literary affairs after that death. Van and Ada, on the other hand, died into literature and into each other and the typescript of Ada is left in the trusty hands of Violet Knox and Ronald Oranger. Person's own death, the victim of arson in a nearly empty hotel, has an irresoluble core of horror about it, despite the elegance which an individual 'polite flamelet' displays (p.103) and the

increasingly intrusive presence of an urbane narrator above and outside the inferno of Person's room. For all narrative disclaimers, we feel 'the crude anguish of physical death' (p.104). We also feel the chill as fate, a jester in bad taste to the end, allows him one last agonising mistake (reflecting how ill his essentially warm and trusting spirit is adapted to life in a world of isolated Chamars and other unhappy shams) -

> Crumbling partitions of plaster and wood allowed human cries to reach him, and one of his last wrong ideas was that those were the shouts of people anxious to help him, and not the howls of fellow men. (p.104)

Baron R. is described as a writer with 'a conspicuous streak of nasty inventiveness': there is frequently something rather similar in Nabokov when he writes about death, and it is at play in both Ada and Transparent Things, but it has a far more chilling effect in the latter book where there is so much less countervailing inventiveness about love, happiness, beauty.

The inhabitants of the modern world of Transparent Things have no true homes, only flats and hotel bedrooms: no national roots, only cosmopolitan New York and neutral international Switzerland: no children, no ancestors, no particularly important role to play. In such a system it is not surprising that the eccentric artist R. appears shockingly flamboyant: in Ada, where nineteenth-century excess prevails, he would have melted into the shadow of the far more eccentric Van Veen. Ada's evocation of the nineteenth century is the key to the differences between the two books: at every point where the two novels' frames of reference meet, as we have seen, nineteenth century meets twentieth century. The polarities between Ada and Transparent

Things are too striking and consistent to be accidental. They serve one immediate purpose, which is to throw into disarray any critic who finds the exaggerations of Ada fit all his preconceptions of a 'typical' Nabokovian universe, and deems that the author has come to the end of his stylised voyage, gone to his overripe spiritual homeland to die. In fact Nabokov emerges unruffled and alive in a quite different set of clothes and a new, sharp, cold, steely book - Touché. Van Bock directs us outside this individual picture in its frame of steel and glass and indicates the tensions which are set up by its proximity to a vast old master in a gilt frame. However, a discussion of the material facts and textures of Transparent Things is quite insufficient to demonstrate the antiphonal relationships between the two books, which are very largely a matter of tone and technique, and this brings me to their respective literary relatives. Alain Robbe-Grillet, most famous of the French exponents of the nouveau roman and their effective spokesman in the 1950s, is as important to Transparent Things as Tolstoy was to Ada, though the dialogue in which Nabokov engages Robbe-Grillet is more polemical in tone.

The title of Nabokov's invocation of the precariously materialistic world of modern man is Transparent Things. He alerts us to the importance of titles via what R. says when defending against philistine publishers his precious but obscure 'Tralatitions' - the title of his latest work:

> Readers did not realise that two types of title existed. One type was the title found by the dumb author or the clever publisher after the book had been written. That was simply a label stuck on...But there was the other kind: the title that shone through the book like a

> watermark, the title that was born with the book, the title to which the author had grown so accustomed during the long years of accumulating the written pages that it had become part of each and all. No, Mr R. could not give up Tralatitions. (p.70)

'Tralatitions' is in fact a synonym for 'metaphors',[49] and its kinship to 'Transparent Things' is much more than a matter of shared letters and rhythmic echo. The first chapter of the book seeks to explain the sense in which things are transparent, and Chapter 3 illustrates itvia a fairly mundane pencil (pp. 6-8). They become so by virtue of the human beholder, a certain type of reflective and creative human beholder, who cannot stay his eye upon their silent surfaces but insists on sinking through into their history, their associations, the whole vertiginous network of lived reality which has somehow converged upon this point, this pencil, this object. To some the pencil may be coextensive with its physical dimensions and function but for the artist it has shadows stretching back to the pinewoods of its infancy. Such a mode of approach to the material world seeds it with metaphors, for as soon as an object becomes transparent it becomes more than itself, a cipher, a vessel into which meaning can be poured. With such perceptions playing over it, the phenomenal world can never be innocent. In Nabokov's work, as we have seen, it never has been innocent, since the days of Mary and the oddly-labelled doors. Nabokov's worlds are always selfconsciously created worlds and the objects he chooses to materialise for us therefore always have messages to bear, links and echoes to transmit. They never exist in their own right, naturalistically, they are always properties, taken out of the master's property box, for in Nabokov's work he is the proprietor and past master of all he surveys. However Transparent Things is the first work in which

Nabokov makes his attitude to the material world the explicit centre of attention of the book: here he does it from the outset, in the title and the book's first page. The form in which he develops his philosophical defence of transparency suggests that he is making a polemical summary here of his long-established artistic practice in order playfully to refute the directly counterposed views expounded by Robbe-Grillet in his 1950 critical writing.

Nabokov is a great admirer of Robbe-Grillet as a 'magnificently poetical and orginal' creative writer but distrusts his theorising and positively dislikes and disbelieves in the notion of the 'French New Novels' as a consistent school.[50] There is a polar conflict between Nabokov's interpretative and somewhat cavalier attitude towards phenomenal 'reality' and Robbe-Grillet's rhetorical defence of the integrity and objective existence of that reality - no inverted commas necessary in the latter case. The best method of demonstrating the conflict may be to quote the relevant passages of Robbe-Grillet's writings in juxtaposition with those passages of Transparent Things which seem to echo Robbe-Grillet's actual images as they offer a direct refutation of his theories. However close the echoes are one cannot of course be quite sure that Nabokov intended a fencing-match with Robbe-Grillet. Nevertheless, Nabokov's interest in Robbe-Grillet and the important conflict in their aethetic is well enough attested from other sources for a comparison to be instructive. The following extracts come from Robbe-Grillet's essay 'A Path for the Future Novel' (1956):

> ...the world is neither meaningful nor absurd. It quite simply is... All around us, defying our pack of animistic

or domesticating adjectives, things are there. Their surface is smooth, clear and intact, without...transparency. The whole of our literature has not yet managed even to begin to penetrate them, to alter their slightest curve... we should try to construct a solider, more immediate world to take the place of this universe of 'meanings'... In the construction of future novels, gestures and objects will be there, before they are something: and they will still be there afterwards, hard, unalterable, ever-present, and apparently quite indifferent to their own meaning... objects will gradually lose their instability and their secrets, they will forego their false mystery, and that suspect inner life...

A little later he expatiates on 'the poverty of the old myths of "depth"':

> The role of the writer traditionally consisted in burrowing down into Nature, in excavating it, in order to reach its most intimate strata...The writer descended into the chasm of human passions and sent up to the apparently tranquil world (that of the surface) victorious messages describing the mysteries he had touched with his fingers. And the sacred vertigo which then overwhelmed the reader, far from causing him any distress or nausea, on the contrary reassured him about his powers of domination over the world... The revolution that has taken place is enormous: not only do we no longer consider the world as a possession, our private property, designed to suit our needs, and domesticable, but, what is more, we don't even believe in these depths any more.[51]

That magisterial 'we' is particularly notable in view of the italicised 'we' - which sounds rather like 'but we, on the other hand...' - in Transparent Things' directly opposed exposition of the relationship between human observer and the world. Nabokov takes delight in precisely those operations which for Robbe-Grillet are buried as deep as the 'old myths of "depth"':

> When we concentrate on a material object...the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object...Transparent things, through which the past shines!...A thin veneer of immediate reality is spread over natural and artificial matter, and whoever wishes to remain in the now, with the now, on the now, should please not break its tension film. Otherwise the inexperienced miracle-worker will find himself no longer walking on water but descending upright among staring fish. (pp. 1-2)

We are reminded of Woolf and her own suspicion of opaque appearances, in 'The Mark on the Wall' she said 'I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts' (see my Chapter 2). The first example Nabokov gives of the transparency of matter concerns the pencil which Person finds in a chance drawer in his hotel room.

> It was...a very plain, round, technically faceless old pencil of cheap pine, dyed a dingy lilac...Now comes the act of attention...A knife and a brass sharpener have thoroughly worked upon it and if it were necessary we could trace the complicated fate of the shavings, each mauve on one side and tan on the other when fresh, but now reduced to atoms of dust whose wide, wide dispersal is panic catching its breath but one should be above it, one gets used to it fairly soon (there are worse terrors). (pp. 6-7)

Nabokov pursues the pencil back to the pine wood in his most extended elaboration of the techniques of transparency. In another we stare through the stuff of a room in a 'hideous old roominghouse' (p.17) where Person in his youth took a stumpy Italian whore, and perceive a Russian novelist and his painter friend who stayed there ninety-two years ago. We are told that the writer had sat at

> that deal table, the very same upon which our Person's whore has plunked her voluminous handbag, [and] there shows through the bag, as it were, the first page of the Faust affair with energetic erasures and untidy insertions in purple, black, reptile-green ink. (p.18)

These are the longest expositions of transparency, but in general it may be said that past and future shine through the material stuff of the book with the clarity of poetic speech, that every detail and incident is infected with Robbe-Grillet's dreaded 'meanings' and 'suspect inner life'. Hugh's death by burning is previsaged not only in a number of minor, dress-rehearsal fires just offstage but also in such objective facts as Armande's married name, 'Armande

Person', which by a little elision gives 'Ar...son', by her black suit and black gloves, by the blind behind her, 'lovely wake of the sun through semitransparent black fabric' (p.27) when he first meets her on the train, by the 'flame-and-soot paperback' (p.25) she has on her lap, which turns out to be one of Mr. R's. The book is in fact titled 'Figures in a Golden Window', but Armande misrenders it as 'The Burning Window' (p.26), and through the gap in the texture of history that her error leaves, we devout rereaders perceive the window at which Hugh will die: for him, alas, the black fabric is only 'semitransparent' and he cannot read his future through the weave... The clues multiply as this taut, short work presses towards its conclusion, when the fire that kills Person consummates its hints and overtures and the whole pattern falls at last into place: Person's 'ultimate vision was the incandescence of a book or a box grown completely transparent or hollow' (p.104). It is the foreglow of those flames which have shone through the apparently solid stuff of the book. When they finally blaze into life, the whole book becomes 'completely transparent', and Robbe-Grillet's confident theorems have been subjected to a complete and stylish reversal.

The issue between Robbe-Grillet's insistence on the importance of surfaces and Nabokov's championing of interpretation and depth is a direct result of Nabokov's own special kind of artistic self-consciousness. I do not think that the quarrel between the two men is a metaphysical one, indeed I think it highly significant that from Nabokov's point of view it is not. When Robbe-Grillet writes literary theory he is indeed attempting to legislate about men's manner of being in the world, something outside the realm of literature, a

matter of metaphysics and what one might call the politics of perception. Robbe-Grillet is opposed philosophically to the body of traditional humanist thought which he blames for our metaphorical reading of the world: he distrusts metaphor because it is a prime device for infecting the objective with subjective meanings, for turning surface into symbol. We should recall at this point the specific gloss of 'metaphors' lent to Nabokov's title by its fictional relative Tralatitions. This is Robbe-Grillet writing about 'Nature, Humanism and Tragedy' in 1958:

> To say that the weather is 'capricious', or a mountain 'majestic', to speak of the 'heart' of the forest, or the 'merciless' sun...goes beyond the mere description of purely physical data...The height of the mountain, whether one likes it or not, takes on a moral value; the heat of the sun becomes the result of someone's intention...these anthropomorphic analogies are too insistently, too coherently, repeated, not to reveal a whole metaphysical system.
>
> It can only be assumed that the writers who use such a terminology do so, more or less consciously, in order to establish a permanent relationship between the universe and the being who inhabits it...
>
> To reject our alleged 'nature' and the vocabulary that perpetuates its myth, to treat objects as purely external and superficial, is not - as people have claimed - to deny man, but to refuse to accept the 'pananthropic' content of traditional, and probably every other, humanism.[52]

Nabokov is in fact answering a different question, though the terms of his answer appear to be in direct contradiction to Robbe-Grillet's. Robbe-Grillet is telling us about the way men, and by

extension writers, describe the actual physical world, and he is linking their perception of this shared world with their definition of their own active place in it. Nabokov, on the other hand, insists with each graceful indication of the artificiality of his fictional scenarios that the world he is describing to us is his - the product of his omniscient and controlling artistic imagination, something made in the end of words, not 'things'. Thus Robbe-Grillet speaks disapprovingly of metaphor making the heat of the sun 'the result of someone's intention' (see above) but in Nabokov that is just the point: the sun only shines to order. There is no innocence about either the crippling heat or the dismal fogs that cause clumsy Person to muff his attempts to join in Armande's mountaineering athletics: the weather in Transparent Things is indeed transparently 'the result of someone's intention'. Nabokov in fact shifts the discussion on to a much more sophisticated aesthetic plane, where the artist does not engage in either a 'subjective' or 'objective' mode with reality, but rather offers us his own hand-crafted model of 'reality', inverted commas somersaulting boldly in the sunlight. Such a 'reality' is only absolutely 'real' within the confines of the art-work we are studying, and in the context of the juxtaposed 'realities' of the other pictures in the studio.

As a great admirer of Robbe-Grillet's inventions, Nabokov would also doubtless point out that this is very similar to what the French-man actually does in his creative texts, as opposed to what he asserts in theoretical tracts. In the interview of September 1966 from which I have already quoted Nabokov firmly distinguishes between the two:

> [His] claims are preposterous. Those manifestos , those dodoes, die with the dadas. His fiction is magnificently poetical and original...(Strong Opinions, p.80)

It is these qualities of Robbe-Grillet's fiction that Transparent Things embodies while refuting his theories. Transparent Things likewise is written by a poet and original rather than a surveyor, a creator of tight hypothetical narrative theorems, not generalised metaphysical theories. Nabokov's artistic practice is in itself a refutation of the simplified theories of the 'objectivist' nouveau roman. All of the pictures in Van Bock's studio 'teem with transparent people and processes...through which we sink with an angel's or author's delight' (p.44): but the second of Nabokov's three last books makes that transparency its overt subject-matter. If I am right in conjecturing that a polemical riposte to unpalatable literary theory was part of Nabokov's original design, the book is clearly the work of a markedly intellectual artist and a demonstration of the twentieth century's intense critical awareness of the problematic nature of literature. Any accusation however that the book's argument is too esoteric or lost in the clouds of aesthetic theory trips up against the tough and intricate foundation-work Nabokov has put in to interrelate the question of artistic technique with a particular view of twentieth-century actuality. There is another kind of transparency in the real world where houses are open-plan, with 'completely visible and audible stairs leading to a similarly overt second-floor' (p.40), where processes are demystified to the point where the consumer is supposed to make his own drinking chocolate from the materials provided, where sexual love is stripped naked of all its rhetorical trappings so the bare act shows through ('"And now one is going to make love...we won't be disturbed, if you

do it quickly"', p.54), where Armande dresses in glossy nylon and 'shoe leather had been replaced by plastic' (p.53). There can be no apter era in which to examine transparency than an era of plastic, and the point is not esoteric. By a curious paradox, the true nature of the modern world is only transparently clear to the imagination of the artist (or Person, an artist manqué), and not to modernity's own proud citizens. All their apparent eagerness for public revelation and an end to mystery and privacy result in blindness and obtuseness: perhaps unsurprisingly insofar as plastic is really a poreless artificial skin, not a window. When artifice poses as something transparently natural, it becomes all the harder for hapless homo sapiens to detect. Real transparency on the other hand is the reward of the artist's sense of depth and history, which comes from his independent (even alienated) perception of the world around him. Transparent Things offers a penetrating survey of the moral and physical denaturing of modern man, an unnaturalness particularly ironic given Armande and her peers' desire to shed all old-fashioned inhibitions and be 'ultramodern, socially and sexually' (p.53), i.e. 'natural' - in their own unnatural eyes. Nevertheless, the relationship between Nabokov's artistic world and the macrocosm outside it, though organic, remains here as elsewhere a matter of metaphorical counterpoint rather than mimesis. The distance imposed by the author's self-sufficient design, the all-important filter of selfconsciousness, diametrically contradicts Robbe-Grillet's model of the artist mirroring the world and directly taking issue with it.

The final twist of Transparent Things, just after the culminating moment where we see 'a book...grown completely transparent and hollow'

(p.104), is the accession to transparency of the one central figure whom we have only seen, except in his brief last letter, from the outside and diminished by caricature - Baron R. The last sentence of the book, a floating admonition, 'Easy, you know, does it, son' (p.104), addressed to Person as he undergoes the throes of death in the fire, refers us back to the book's opening pages and the affectionate voice which first hails Person in the street: 'Here's the person I want. Hullo, person! Doesn't hear me.' (p.1) But it also recalls the parodied 'foreign' speech of Mr. R. earlier in the book when he was still deliberately artificial 'with his clayey makeup and false grin' (p.30). 'Son' is his favourite appellation - '"O.K., son"' (p.69). This casts a new light upon R.'s final remark to Person - '"So long and soon see"' (p.71). They were never to see each other again in life, but it appears that they were soon to meet on a plane independent of the world of nasty accidents, at the end of book. Nabokov confirms this hypothesis in an interview he gave in the year of Transparent Things' publication (1972), an interview which is as teasing as the book itself but which does give away one definite fact:

> 'One thing...is quite tranparent and certain...it is no other than a discarnate... Mr. R. who greets newly-dead Hugh in the last line of the book.'[53]

At the last our attention is drawn away from the fascinating transparency of the selective world within the frame and outwards to the frame itself. And now it is Mr. R. who grows transparent as we suddenly slip inside the mind of the figure we have only seen externally and caricaturally, while the drama lasted, as a character actor playing a pantomime Nabokov. Artists can always be caricatured in an invented world, but they also enjoy the special grace of being

able to step outside it in the end. Mr. R. ends up in his rightful place as an inventor, commenting genially on the end of the action, pointing to the real powers of the author he has mimicked so entertainingly for our benefit. This is why G.M. Hyde's interpretation of the book seems so wrong-headed: he detects a 'Beckettian scepticism about the activity of writing' and considers 'the reification of Hugh's world' to be 'a moral correlative to his arrogance'.[54] In fact it is Armande's twentieth-century world which is reified, and Hugh and his author merely observe it. As for 'Beckettian scepticism', my next chapter will show what worlds separate Beckett's disgust with the world from Nabokov's sense of the traps and difficulties in language, which merely add spice to his ultimate love and trust for art and language.

In one sense the lesson of Bend Sinister and Invitation to a Beheading is repeated: in the real world the accidental death of such lovable characters as Person is unbearable, but in art the artist can offer some kind of release into artifice - he can seek to replace Person's 'crude anguish' by something much more distant and metaphorical, 'the incomparable pangs of the mysterious mental manoeuvre needed to pass from one state of being to another' (p.104). The transition seems to be from an apparently 'real' existence on the page where Person can feel terrible pain and the reader can feel it with him, to the consciousness that he is only, like R., like the whole transparent world, a figment of the author's imagination: so that after the last word is written he can return to that tranquil 'state of being' in the author's brain. As we see Person dissolve and a ghostly R. materialise before our eyes, that 'mysterious mental

manoeuvre' is parallelled by our own as we obey Nabokov's formula and move away to a point where we can see the whole pattern as a created picture among other pictures. Thus the end of Transparent Things bears some analogies to the end of that totally contrasted book, Ada, the enormous colour print alongside which Transparent Things has the minute black-and-white precision of a negative. In both cases we end with a sense of the author's creations being enfolded in a literary eternity: but in Ada they never really died, in Ada the artist was god and his world had four golden dimensions, one of them time, which brought with it the fabulous riches of history - whereas in Transparent Things death is everywhere, the artist looks like a clown, most of the world is two-dimensional, time is running out, and the cupboard of human resources looks pretty bare.

The question, where can the artist go from there - after two such carefully counterposed and complementary exercises in the construction of a last book - is answered by Look At The Harlequins (1974), this time literally a last book, since death for Nabokov set the seal upon the project in 1977. Look At The Harlequins, conveniently abbreviated for us within the text as 'LATH' (p.86), is the most literary of the series of three, the most allusive, in some ways the lightest and brightest. The whole artefact is a forest of clues, and the reader has to be a literary detective or nothing. Whereas Ada or Transparent Things could be read and enjoyed by a non-Nabokovian, this latest work is, I would think, completely inaccessible in terms of its central meanings to someone unacquainted with Nabokov's oeuvre. In LATH, Nabokov in effect steps back into

literary history - his own - as indeed he must in death. The book is a kind of parody resumé of his life's work, his life's journeys, his lifetime obsessions, - time, love, coincidence, the relationship between art and death. Parody indeed is the keynote, and if Mr. Hyde wanted to find 'Beckettian scepticism' in Nabokov's work he would be better advised to look for it here - though really 'Nabokovian irony' would fit the case more exactly. LATH'S central character is never fully identified: a youthful friend, Ivor Black, jestingly calls him 'McNab' (p.7), and we are told his forename and patronymic, Vadim Vadimovich - a Russian slurring of Vladimir Vladimirovich, as he actually points out. We are never told the surname, which Vadim himself forgets in a kind of nervous paralysis which overcomes him at the end of the book, but he knows it is in some mysterious way connected with English politician 'Nabarro', and exotic trisyllabic foreign names beginning with 'N' (pp. 248-249). If this sounds rather laboured, it is only so because the dullest reader must be made to realise the possibility of identifying Vadim Vadimovich with Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, simply because that identification is the first step in a complex series of jokes depending upon the fact that the identity does not quite fit. Apparently exact resemblances dissolve and a large difference pops out like a gloating jack-in-the-box. The subject of the joke is of course ourselves, the assiduous readers who have been trained by Nabokov's other work to look unceasingly for echo and correspondence, for references to the other works in the studio and demonstration of the artist's tools. Vadim himself, to crown the joke, is uneasily aware from time to time of a dreadful suspicion that he is just 'a figment of somebody's - not even my own - imagination'

(p.249), that he is possibly being dreamed by someone else just like the dreamer in Borges' 'The Circular Ruins'.[55] He is haunted by

> a dream feeling that my life was the non-identical twin, a parody, an inferior variant of another man's life, somewhere on this or another earth. A demon, I felt, was forcing me to impersonate that other man, that other writer who was and would always be incomparably greater, healthier, and crueler than your obedient servant. (LATH, p.89)

Vadim's suspicions are fed by the behaviour of the other characters in the book, who frequently seem to confuse Vadim with someone else: they say they have read Vadim's books but then reveal by their comments that they have in fact read Nabokov's own (very similar) books instead. Thus the emigré man of letters Oksman praises Nabokov's Mary when he should be talking about Vadim's Tamara, Nabokov's Camera Obscura instead of Vadim's Camera Lucida (pp. 93-94). Later on the Soviet agent Oleg Orlov has read Nabokov's Lolita rather than Vadim's A Kingdom by the Sea (p.218). Vadim is thus very frequently within a hair's breadth of knowing the truth which we in the audience are supposed to know very well, that he is the creature and copy of Nabokov himself: that his style, his polyglot puns, his literary allusions, his change of language, his sensitivity to mistranslation, do indeed echo the patterns of another life. The titles of his books are a cunning blending and patchwork of Nabokov's own, as are the plots, but with all the elements shaken and stirred, a curiously unsettling and tantalising technique which leaves the reader perpetually in the position of recognising a long-lost friend in the street, then seeing that it isn't him after all, that characteristic Roman nose is gone... The purpose of all this seems to be to make us readers tumble over each other in our eagerness to trace a reference or a

resemblance, as I did in the reading and do now (with more circumspection) in the commentary. Allusions to Nabokov's own work are blatant enough for most of this work's subsequent reviewers to have realised something was going on, and jumped on it. In the end the overhasty critic falls flat on his face, because Vadim's Pawn Takes Queen, for example, is not simply a parody of Nabokov's King Queen Knave, the chess reference also links it to Nabokov's The Defence: and Vadim's The Dare stands midway between Nabokov's Dar (the original Russian title of The Gift) and Nabokov's Glory (because Glory's original Russian title was Podvig) and as Nabokov has pointed out (Foreword to Glory,p.xii) 'the obvious translation of podvig is 'exploit', and Martin's notion of honour does indeed consist in performing exploits in response to a self-made dare.[56] The lack of exact correlation between model and mimic is often a source of sly wit: detailed description of Vadim suggests that he resembles the Nabokov of the later photos exactly, 'lambda' between the eyebrows and all (p.227) - all except for his full head of hair, 'leonine' at first, later more discreet, which Nabokov would doubtless have liked to transfigure his own balding pate. Much earlier in the book Vadim has spoken of the young author's prevision of himself as an older one, the 'forefeel of fame' (p.23): this may remind us of the passage in Strong Opinions where Nabokov remembers his own 'forefeel of fame', and we see how LATH delicately completes the circle -

> At fifteen I visualised myself as a world-famous author of seventy with a mane of wavy hair. Today I am practically bald... (Strong Opinions, p.178)

Actual inconsistency within the text, pointing to the 'untruth' and thus the unreality of LATH's world, appears with the lepidoptery theme. Nabokov was a Fellow of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at

Harvard from 1941 - 1948, has captured many rare specimens, and written unforgettably about the joys of butterfly hunting.[57] At first Vadim appears to be totally ignorant of butterflies, referring to moths as 'the fluffier nightflying ones' (p.34), proudly declaring an indifference bordering on dislike. However, it is not long before he is identifying himself as a 'fellow madman' of the concert pianist Kanner who is an ardent lepidopterist in his spare time (p.36), and then in a restaurant he notices and correctly identifies some splendid specimens of Morpho butterflies in a case (p.67). Later on there is a puzzling lyrical passage in the Rocky mountains - puzzling to the reader who does not know the purpose of the frequent summer visits Nabokov and his wife made to the Rockies:[58]

> What form of mysterious pursuit caused me to get my feet wet like a child, to pant up a talus, to stare every dandelion in the face, to start at every coloured mote passing just beyond my field of vision? What was the dream sensation of having come empty-handed - without what? A gun? A wand? This I dared not probe lest I wound the raw fell under my thin identity. (LATH, pp. 155-156)

The ghostly pursuit which tickles at Vadim's sense of identity is Nabokov's own love of butterfly-hunting, the 'coloured motes' are butterflies when properly focussed, and the object he is missing may indeed in one sense be a wand (see later), but that wand in this instance looks very like Vladimir Nabokov's butterfly net. The wittiest twist to Vadim's identity problem is embodied in his efforts to quash his sense of being an inferior imitation once and for all. He thinks he ought perhaps to give up fiction and choose an entirely different 'line of achievement' (p.97). The alternative lines of achievement he considers are chess, lepidoptery and obscure works of

scholarship - all of which, needless to say, are ancillary Nabokovian areas of expertise. The face behind the mask, whenever the mask is thus deliberately allowed to slip, is always smiling. Thus the comedy of Vadim's unwilling and not quite witting mimicry of Vladimir Nabokov, and the underplot of the reader's recognition of it, provides the central structural impetus to LATH: Nabokov is setting us off like a pack of eager hounds after the fox. But the book's cohesiveness is also secured through a pattern of recurrent imagery stronger and more insistent than that of any other Nabokov work, even the dummy imagery we have traced in King Queen Knave: and this will return us to the mysterious wand that Vadim felt he needed in the Rocky mountains.

Baron R. in Transparent Things wanted his title, 'Tralatitions' to shine 'through the book like a watermark' (p.70). That is just what 'Look At The Harlequins' and its associated abbreviation, 'LATH', does for Nabokov's last book. Nabokov obligingly points to the abbreviated form, 'LATH', (p.86), because these initials spell 'lath', the material from which the harlequin's bat or wand, the magic instrument of his art, was traditionally made:[59] lath is also the substance from which the delicate tracery of summer terraces is woven. Essentially the title announces, first, that a clever punster is at work, secondly that the book is about the magician's wand, the artist's symbol of potency. The artist is a harlequin in that he is a masked entertainer, dressed in brilliant diamonds of stylised colour, ultimately unknowable beneath the ritual disguise. The world he observed and creates afresh for us is full of more metaphorical harlequins, jewelled intersections of form and light which exist for

the alchemy of happiness, for LATH is above all an exhortation to happiness and in intention a happy book. It may be interesting to note en passant that Robbe-Grillet, whose 'dead' myths of depth were so thoroughly brought to life again in Transparent Things, has an equally dismissive reference in the same essay to a vein of imagery very like this central one of LATH:

> 'We are used to this literature...functioning like a screen, made of pieces of differently coloured glass, which splits our field of perception up into small, easily assimilable squares.'[60]

Nabokov's artist does indeed set up a stained-glass screen for the purpose of skillfully refracting our perceptions of reality, and the technique is far from dead, nor are all its effects 'easily assimilable'. The artist is playful, unlike Robbe-Grillet in his manifestoes: for Harlequin belongs to the old Italian Commedia dell' Arte, all life is essentially a comedy, and even the end of life must be looked on as a necessary jest, as the last page of the book, the most cheerful, trivial, cosily sleepy of Nabokov's endings, suggests.

The Harlequin imagery reinforces the tone of authorial gaiety and artifice wherever it recurs. We see dapples of brilliant colour in unexpected places, 'sudden reshufflings - kaleidoscopic, stained-glass reshufflings! - of fragmented space' (p.85). There is a related vein of circus imagery to which I shall return at the end of this chapter, circus-horses (p.74), acrobats (p.75), and later two full circus companies - 'every scene in its place, every trapeze in the stars' (pp. 123 and 208). 'Pantaloon' is Harlequin's fellow-player in classic comedy. This reference is picked up by a string

of clownish trouser-images: they and their related long underpants are sported by the farcical psychoanalyst Mrs. Junker (p.17), a similar pair trips Vadim as he vainly tries to escape from a nymphomaniac across a hospital lawn (p.146), and later, a name-tape forgetfully sewn inside the waistband of his old trousers makes a nonsense of his attempt to conceal his true name from the Soviet authorities (p.204). The first important scenes of the books are set near Carnavaux - carnivals being a fine setting for harlequins: and an 'adviser' suddenly brought on stage near the end of the book is called 'Harley Q' (p.204). Too much sunbathing causes Vadim to be burnt in diamond patches, and when consciousness returns to him after his long illness later that also returns in small regular patches of sensation (pp. 242-243). The 'great aunt' whose role it is to cheer up Vadim as a sulky small boy by bidding him '"Look at the harlequins"' (p.8), the first occurrence of the phrase, pronounces it '"lookaty", assonating with "lickety" harlequins (p.9), which seems a mere phonetic quibble until the book's next scene finds us with Vadim's old godfather Count Starov, and Starov offers him some brilliantly-coloured little sweets like beads which spill on the floor... 'lickety harlequins' indeed (p.11). The little beads of harlequin colour and vividness are scattered all over the floor of the real physical world, and when at the end of the book 'Reality entered' Vadim's trance in the form of his last love, she hides her tears with a pair of 'harlequin sunglasses' (p.250). The stirring injunction that the old aunt gives, '"Look at the harlequins"', is part of Nabokov's own final message to his readers, and a fitting one insofar as his rarest gift as a writer is the ability to write well about happiness. One level of LATH is concerned

to tell us that we should look at the world and rejoice in its intricacies of pattern and form, noting how magical deception 'is practiced even more beautifully by 'that other V.N., Visible Nature'.[61]

Nevertheless, LATH is a harder book to respond to directly than either of its predecessors, indeed than any other Nabokov work. There is less to touch the heart or shock the soul, more to tease the problem-solving brain. Vadim is never quite as 'real' to us as Nabokov's other heros, fittingly enough as he doubts his own reality, and we are constantly nudged into doubting it too. In other Nabokovian works a formal insistence upon the fictional status of his characters is counterweighted by the immediacy of their presence on the page, and the relative absence of this in Vadim's case gives him less hold over our emotions and consequently perhaps our attentions. Though love is as usual described with considerable tenderness, its solemnity is placed in parenthesis and our involvement is precluded because this time there are four wives, four loves, rather than the single passion we are accustomed to find beating at the heart of Nabokov's novels, and most signally in Ada. The status of Vladim's own parody version of Ada, a novel called 'Ardis', illustrates this point. The doubling of Ada and Ardis is clear, but everything has been shaken in a kaleidoscope: the woman who most resembles Nabokov's Ada, Iris with her black hair and full lips, has been left far behind at the beginning of the career which Vadim consummates with Ardis, and he offers that work to another lover.[62] Moreover Vadim's own sense of involvement with the book is compromised: later he will suspect

> that even Ardis, my most private book, soaked in reality, saturated with sun flecks, might be an unconscious imitation of another's unearthly art... (p.234)

We compare these levels of authorial distance with Van Veen's passionate and singleminded involvement with his beloved Ada, and with his book.

Ada was a book about incest: if LATH sounds incestuous in a much wider and more final sense, that is correct. For any reader who has read enough of Nabokov's earlier work to pick up the allusions, the work is a nightmare of tangled wit and erudition through which one clambers, aided by the magic walking-shoes of Nabokov's style and stopping occasionally transfixed and grateful for a peacock-spot of authentic sorrow or passion. One must at once add that these pleasures are far from negligible. There are as ever fascinating passages where Vadim talks about the joys and perils of his craft: the pain of changing his language (pp. 123 - 126), the mundane but radiant delight of handing over a completed text to the photocopier, the joy of savouring in advance the reaction of a good reader (p.234). And there are vignettes of the central business of actual creation behind it all:

> the most authentic and faithful joys of my life: the coloured phrase in my mind under the drizzle, the white page under the desk lamp awaiting me in my humble home. (p.79)

This speaks to us directly enough, and so do odd passages of tender emotion. Here the imagery of stained glass is transmuted into something broken and desecrated after Annette has her child and Vadim becomes impotent -

> echoes of her pangs in the darkest corridors of my brain and a frightening stained window at every turn - the

> afterimage of a wounded orifice - pursued me and deprived me of all my vigour. (p.136)

This rings the more terribly because elsewhere stained glass has always linked us with the harlequin sequins of happiness. On the other side of the emotional spectrum we have an extremely evocative description of a golden afternoon walk Vadim takes after drinking an equally golden quart of champagne, several pages of the most lucidly-rendered, swelling, dancing, drunkenness (pp. 232 - 235). Nevertheless, these things are easily picked out simply because they are so much rarer than before, and there is infinitely more of the arch playfulness, the crossword clues, the humorous semi-autobiography, the repetition of themes and ideas from earlier works, the reworking of old jokes. It cannot be denied, then, that LATH is incestuous in the extreme. The additional question must unfortunately arise for any literary critic trying to provide that impossible thing, a critical summary of a life's work:- is the old artist finally losing his touch?

I think that what is happening is that Nabokov is writing about being an old artist. I think he is writing about the most insidious traps that beset the working artist, the multiple traps of institutionalised literature, of fame, of the critical industry, the biographical industry, and within all of these the brambles of endlessly intertwining literary topics, types and tropes. The treatment is lighthearted, the mood is mellow, resigned and ironic, but essentially this theme is saddening to the reader who has hitherto accepted Nabokov's almost insanely esoteric allusiveness and linguistic playfulness simply because there was so much else as well, because the heart and central nervous system of each book was always powerful

enough to support the intricate extremities and indexing digits, because the books could be read and loved by readers who did not possess the formidable armoury of scholarship needed for the fullest appreciation of the subtleties of the text. In the end LATH is one for the scholars, a parody of our procedures and a provocation to us to delve further, and we should not complain when Nabokov has given us so much else. More importantly, we should not cavil at incestuousness without considering that incestuousness may be an integral part of the aim of the book, which can be seen as a preemptive, witty prevision of the books which sometimes appear in glut after an author's death - critical summaries, literary biographies, and, worse still, the intrusive kinds of biography which The Real Life of Sebastian Knight and later Transparent Things set themselves so firmly against. In LATH the hostility gains a new force that one might conjecture derived in part from Nabokov's own experiences with the man who actually was to be his posthumous biographer, Andrew Field.[63] No 'matter-of-fact, father-of-muck, mucking biograffitist' (p.226) shall ever pry into his last love affair, Vadim insists, drawing golden veils over its contours. In one sense LATH with its highly polished and formal art is a direct demonstration of the Nabokovian maxim quoted at the beginning of this chapter to the effect that 'the best part of a writer's biography is not the record of his adventures but the story of his style': it is a direct challenge to the supposedly faithful but frequently formless, pedestrian, and prying art of the 'human interest' biographer. Life often copies art, rather than vice versa, LATH suggests, and artifice is everywhere, so beware of ferreting out supposed truths behind fictional constructs. The book proves its theorem quite literally by making

the 'real life' of Vadim echo the 'art' of another man, the art of Vladimir Nabokov. So much for 'biograffitists': and Nabokov also laughs at more solemn literary critics and his own acolytes by deliberate overelaboration of the allusion and cross-reference that they love. This is all polished, gay, dry, bright. But an important strand in LATH points to the real torments of cerebral and literary life as well. It speaks of the inescapably labyrinthine nature of learning and the intellectual vertigo of the oversubtle mind, comic to the outsider but crippling to the sufferer, a vertigo from which only a shock of reality, love or tenderness, can wake us, just as Vadim's last love saves his sanity at the end of the book, when into his knotted and paralysed brain 'Reality entered...' (p.250)

It is the glory of his return to 'normal' consciousness, the bliss of her presence, the knowledge that she will marry him, the proximate joys of tea, sleep and rum, which smooth away the paralysing weight of the intellectual conundrum. Negotiating LATH, we start to long for just such intrusions of 'Reality', for clearer air and a simpler relationship with the invented world we have been invited to witness. The infinitely receding, not-quite-properly-aligned series of mirrors is fascinating but also exhausting. We care about Vadim only because we know he is the puppet of Vladimir Nabokov, and he has won our admiration and awe and love by doing other things than sending us scurrying to other shelves, other books, dictionaries, histories of literature. Previously this has been a secondary effect of his work, a task for the admiring re-reader after the first gripping and thrilling reading is over.

This time we cannot get beyond the first pages without our scholarly apparatus, which is really an essential breathing apparatus in this rarefied air. It seems to me that the whole book serves as a metaphor, at its widest level, for the fate of the world-acclaimed artist at the end of his oeuvre. No work of his can be read without reference to his other works: so many details of his life are spied out, hoarded and broadcast to the world that the most arbitrary and innocent details of his fictions will be read as autobiography. His private art will be involved in the mighty public maze of university courses, literary prizes, fatuous reviews, Formosan editions (p.215) etc. which the twentieth century has erected around its writers, and which makes such a grimly comic appearance in LATH. In short, the fate of Vadim exemplifies everything in the highly-organised operations of the twentieth-century literary industry which helps to imprison the writer in a less pleasant land of selfconsciousness, that of the live organism under the microscope. Images of imprisonment recur throughout the book, and at a primary level they refer us to Vadim's uneasy feeling that he is trapped in another man's consciousness, to wit the author's, as indeed he is, and this is an intellectual jest rather than a tragedy: but at another level the metaphors chime all too aptly with the reader's sense of imprisonment within a house of fiction grown into Borges' 'Library of Babel',[64] infinite and infinitely repetitious, though the parts are never the same... The reader feels like one of the silver balls trapped in the little toy labyrinth that appears twice in the story (pp. 18 and 145): he is stuck on the perfectly round artificial hill around which the little green train runs forever (p.70). And Nabokov himself is trapped there too, pragmatically speaking, even though he himself designed the metaphorical trap, for

his last work is only accessible to those learned enough to know the passwords granting admission to the inner maze wherein he sits, a mythical beast, a sacré monstre with a vengeance. Though he voices a simple and singing lyrical formula, 'Look at the harlequins', though the diamonds of light are there, though he insists on a mood of gaiety and wants the reader to be gay too - for many the voice will never manage to emerge through the involutions of the structure, and for many others the act of 'Looking' will seem to take place at so many removes from the natural world of 'that other V.N.' that the authenticity of the lyricism is lost. It might perhaps have been a terrible vengeance on the sacré monstre himself if he had lived to write more books and they had run on and on around the tireless grooves of academe in the same style. It is all very well to say that this <u>was</u> in fact Nabokov's last work and that every man can afford one book that is sheer self-parody and self-discussion, especially when the jokes are as good and the style as exquisite as Nabokov's: to point out that Vadim <u>does</u> escape in the end towards the 'Reality' which Nabokov is still capable of perceiving and recording for us sometimes, as the flashes of harlequin beauty dancing through the pages prove. The trouble is, too many readers will never reach the release of that end alongside the author's pampered creature, Vadim, or, to unmask the harlequin, alongside the author: and the selfconscious author must finally be the abortive author, the self-slayer, when his art becomes so richly encrusted with images and distortions of himself that the reader cannot support its weight or understand its function, or reach the last page at the author's side....

Having made that tentative judgement, one must at once forfeit any claim to originality, for it seems to be embodied in the structure of the book. It must therefore stand in ironic parenthesis, for Nabokov is not so much enacting a failure of communication as deliberately demonstrating it. It is not quite true that (as Transparent Things asserts) 'there is no mirage without a vanishing point, just as there is no lake without a closed circle of reliable land' (p.93)- not with this author. There may always be another mirage outside the mirage, another frame of meaning outside the apparent frame, and intellectual doubt runs on for ever when the Nabokovian critic is debating the complexities of authorial intent. One must therefore certainly ring around the foregoing remarks about the sense of brittleness and entrapment in LATH with the rider that the ultimate design of LATH may well be to dramatise just such a trap, just such a Mad Hatter's teaparty moving round for ever, and to smile grandly at it all.[65] For the author, unlike Barth or Brophy or B.S. Johnson when selfconscious paralysis strikes, can still by one of his habitual superhuman efforts levitate out of this literary labyrinth (where the guests are always the same and slowly all the clean cutlery gets used up) simply by melting into an irised eyelet of sunlight on the nearby river, a peacock blaze of summer and found time upon the grass....

Ada was solid and substantial: its portrait of the artist, Van, depicts the artist as generous grandee. Transparent Things and LATH both represent a stepping away, a lightening of tone, a knowing, allusive and affectionate survey on the one hand of the writer's 'clayey makeup and false grin',[66] on the other hand of his earthly

jewels, his works, before all the properties go back into the property box. The survey is conducted in worlds which are much thinner and flatter than Ardis. These are temporary aerial scenarios for the enactment of narrative theorems, whereas Van wrote about four-dimensional great estates, grand manor-houses and sunny groves. Where Ada impressed upon us an intoxicating sense of what Strong Opinions called 'the monstrous delights of novelistic invention' (p.145), experienced from the inside, Transparent Things steps outwards into a chill, relatively 'real' world where the artist is mostly seen from the outside fighting battles with sales figures, editors and lawyers, where even sympathetic readers like Person look upon the physical manifestations of writers as something of a joke, and the joke ends with a nasty death that all R.'s skill cannot defer or evade - though in Ada artists were effectively immortal. The prevailing note in Transparent Things is unflinching ironic observation of the realities of the literary game, the inadequacy and arrogance of some modern literary theory, and the somewhat less than god-like status of the artist to those who feed upon him - all of which serves as an apt corrective counterweight to the god-like freedoms artists were allowed to enjoy in Ardis.

The artist-portrait of LATH is different again. Vadim is at the centre of the canvas, though he is only allowed to be aware of half of its informing structures and patterns. He is not, like Van Veen, the impassioned author of a work of art which constantly announces its greatness, and its author's commitment, to us: he is a gentle, relaxed memoirist casting his literary biography in the form of an

episodic novel. Behind his back of course his own author works to turn the memoir into the most elaborately castellated folly. It is not clear how much of this structure is open to the public. Nevertheless LATH represents the real and final divesting of jewels: here they all are, the many lapidiary works, their facets slightly changed but arranged with consummate skill in an ironised version of Ada's 'offering' or 'royal-grant' gesture[67] in the display case of this velvet-lined, civilised museum of a book. In this last of Nabokov's last books he has finally removed himself to a meta-level where everything is art about art, everything is distanced. Love has become serial, like men's lives: nothing matters quite so much. LATH's last page also gives us a final image of detachment from the assembled corpus of novels which have totally dominated the structure of this last book, the novels whose many editions fill a back room in Nabokov's Montreux-Palace eyrie.[68] They are so securely present in the minds of the special body of readers for whom Nabokov is working that he can dare to build an entire plot around echoes and variants: but at the end of all the complicated stage business the artist finally longs to withdraw to the wings and beyond. Vadim meditates on an image which surely gives a key to the meaning of this withdrawal, though its immediate application is to his wife's solution of the Space-Time problem -

> '... it resembles... the neat formula a physicist finds to keep people happy until...the next chap snatches the chalk.' (p.253)

The implication of that seems to be that ultimately another thinker, another writer must take over the task Nabokov has devoted his life to performing: the end of LATH suggests that he views the prospect with something like pleasure and relief - a pleasure which can only

be based upon confident retrospect, and such a retrospective assessment has constituted, in tongue-in-cheek version, the subject-matter of LATH. 'Was I an excellent writer? I was an excellent writer.' (p.234) This surely is the happiest spirit in which a great artist can approach the end of his life, given that he has enjoyed Nabokov's rare luck in continued productivity, and critical and material recognition: accepting, finally, that he is mortal, that he is tired, that other masters will take the chalk from his hand and go on, and he in his turn will become part of the literary tradition he has so painstakingly studied and mined. Here a selfconsciousness which allows the artist to place himself in a tradition brings peace.

Nabokov died in the summer of 1977, one hopes with that kind of peace, having dramatised in his last three books the complexities of the artist's attitude to death. Nabokov told us in the epigraph to this chapter that the ideal reader should have a sense at the end of his books of the whole receding into the distance and becoming a picture in a picture of the artist's studio - in other words, the room where all Van Bock's other pictures hang. The last three books then end up hanging in the middle-distance side by side, and death cannot touch them. This had been metaphorically previsaged at the end of Ada, where despite the fact of pain life slips easily away into the golden thread of language which has been woven to hold it fast. For all his unflinching acceptance of the fact that in the world outside 'terminally ill' is a 'hideous phrase that no quotes can cure',[69] it remains true that the world with which Nabokov wishes us finally to be concerned as readers, the

world of Van Bock's studio, is flooded with sunlight. The formality, the insistently intruding frames of the studio, are primarily devices for protecting the sunlight, shoring it up against accusations of sentimentality or naivety. Thus after all LATH's cool games of literary mix-and-match, its last 'sun-striped' pages can refer us without mawkishness to something quite different, 'Reality' after a lifetime's construction of fantasticated '"reality"', happiness in love, warmth, tea, rum and the crowning pleasure (especially for an insomniac like Nabokov) of slipping into sleep after a lifetime of work and wide-eyed self-awareness. It is pleasant to think that we can safely leave Nabokov's last fictional artist thus protected, drowsing amongst these carefully-chosen and harmoniously mumbling consonants:

> '...mumbling comfortably, dropping off, mumble dying away - ' (pp. 250-253)

A kind of suffusing radiance appears to characterise the works of both Virginia Woolf and Vladimir Nabokov when we compare them to Samuel Beckett, the subject of my last chapter. Beckett's closed systems have their own equally intricate formal beauty but they are predominantly dark, chill, isolated places smelling of death. One of their worst horrors is Beckett's view of the imperative to create (and thus of the creative artist): he finds writing irresistible, yet also most of the time farcical, inappropriate and disgusting. In comparison Woolf and Nabokov as selfconscious artists are aligned in their ability to evoke happiness, and, more important, their ability to portray the artist's role as an essentially joyful one. All the same, a glance across from the end of this chapter to the end of the preceding one may lead us to think how

relatively innocent was Woolf's world. Woolf was essentially an English priestess in her intensity and commitment and could never have adopted Nabokov's frequently bantering, arrogant, playful mode of address to his readers or his art. The vision of Between the Acts is, despite its darker notes, essentially a trusting and even a naive one, the sketch for a possible future of art as an organic and honoured part of the integrated community's concerns. Where she gave us as her final choice of a desirable artistic model the village pageant, the artist moving out into the open and offering a comprehensible art-work where each can have their part, Nabokov steps proudly back into a difficult but beautiful area of aesthetic contemplation, his studio - quite sure that reviewers and students and thesis-writers, among others, will flock to his studio door. The difference between the two writers is partly a matter of passing time and changing literary mores: Nabokov was literally as well as colloquially a 'man of the world', a successful writer in the literary world of the late twentieth century. Since Woolf's death everything has changed in scope: the little press has become a global industry, the Formosan paper-back edition is a reality, the hundreds Woolf earned with such pride have become thousands and millions, popular films are mined from the most abstruse of books, and ten years after a writer first brings forth the tender imago of a nymphet there may be stereotyped imitations of Lolita on every real-life street corner. Nabokov inhabits a world where writers are celebrities in a sense quite different from Eliot's when he said that Woolf was 'the centre of the literary life of London'.[70] The selection of magazine interviews in Strong Opinions demonstrates that London, New York and

even Montreux are now the focusses of a global network of communication which wants writers to provide instant comment on their works for magazines and newspapers, mass editions of their works for schools and universities, live coverage of the artist reading from cards and sipping a glass of water for the cathode tube. Small wonder that Nabokov must look at many of these phenomena through the eye-slits of a mask of ironic detachment. Small wonder, also, that he makes cool artistic capital from the funnier features of the whole overcomplicated, overselfconscious literary world. Whether we like LATH or not, we recognise the emergence, through its weave, of undesirable truths. Nabokov had to know about vulgarisms and plagiarisms, commercialisations and mass academic examinations which never cast their shadow upon the writing that Woolf always did essentially alone, arguing passionately for the worth of her art in a society and age which did not posthumously fulfil her fierce hopes for them. Behind all Nabokov's endlessly interpenetrating series of masks, poses and disguises there is an equally ardent commitment to art. But the years have passed, Leavis' myth of the 'organic community' slips ever further away into the distance, Nabokov's Russia (and its Ardisian memory) have gone for good, and the selfconscious artist has come to need a different voice or series of voices, different protective devices ... He can no longer afford to love a hypothetical idealised public and hope to serve it: the people in the village watch the television rather than the pageant now, and any way it is not a real village but McLuhan's global village made of shining glass and steel. And yet one can perhaps trace some residual imprint of Woolf's longing that the artist should have a simple, central role in Nabokov's return (in the paradoxically esoteric LATH) to a vein

of imagery which raises the notion of the artist as public entertainer or clown, a lost romanticism where the circus-people are already exiles and anachronisms, but are the more touched with magic and desire because of that:

> ...I asked him...if he knew anything about a picturesque group that had boarded our aircraft in Moscow...they were, he believed, Iranian circus people touring Europe. The men looked like harlequins in mufti, the women like birds of paradise, the children like golden medallions, and there was one dark-haired pale beauty in black bolero and yellow shalvars who reminded me of Iris or a prototype of Iris.
> 'I hope', she said, 'we'll see them perform in Leningrad.'
> 'Pouf!' he rejoined. 'They can't compete with our Sovient circus.' (LATH p.208)

The 'dark-haired pale beauty' is of course an echo of Ada, wearing Ada's black and yellow,[71] and the reference thus links the picturesque entertainers to the lost exoticism of Ardis, the land left far behind in Look At The Harlequins and Transparent Things. Perhaps Woolf with her romantic vision of the pageant would not have been so ill at ease in a world where Van and Ada's doings became precious folk-myth, where all the Ardis household turned out for the pageant of the Burning Barn, where artists were the only gods and Van in his youth was a spectacularly popular public entertainer, Mascodagama who danced on his hands...Older men, ironic and scholarly and selfconscious men, must perforce play much more distanced and intellectual roles. But it seems from the lovely intrusions of circus imagery into the academic games of LATH that, like Van, Nabokov in old age 'still...dances on his hands - in a recurrent dream'.[72]

NOTES

As elsewhere in this work I have simplified bibliographical details in the case of works originally written in Russian by giving the earliest date of publication but the title of the subsequent English translation. For fuller details see Nabokov Bibliography.

1. Strong Opinions, pp. 62-92 (pp. 72-73).

2. 1967: all page references are to 1969 Penguin edition. Nabokov explains in his Foreword to the work that it is a revised and elaborated version of the earlier Speak Memory (London 1951) which was in fact published earlier that same year in New York under the title Conclusive Evidence.

3. Life in Part, p. 9. See later and especially Note 63 for details of this controversy.

4. Nabokov's 'I' is more plural than other people's, and he prefers multiplication to division, appearing in the works mentioned in this chapter under such soubriquets as Vivian Badlook, Vivian Darkbloom, Blavdak Vinomori, Adam Von Librikov and Vadim Vadimovich.

5. Bend Sinister, p.6.

6. Life in Part, p.25. The 'Montreux-Palace' is the hotel where Nabokov lived.

7. See Strong Opinions, p. 146. See also Alfred Appel Jr., 'Ada Described', in Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes, edited Appel and Charles Newman (New York 1970), pp. 160-186 (p.182 and note).

8. 1967 Foreword to 1968 edition of King Queen Knave: 1970 Panther edition, p.7.

9. Life in Part, p. 264.

10. G. M. Hyde (Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist, 1977, p. 39) notes the aptness of the stuck lift to the situation of the emigrés. Andrew Field (Life in Art, p. 125)points to a more immediate level of symbolism in the meeting between the two men in the dark, viz. that Alfyorov's wife is Ganin's old lover, but both men are 'in the dark' about it.

11. Gleb Struve recommends the reader to be 'constantly aware' of authorial contrivance ('Notes on Nabokov as a Russian Writer', in Nabokov: The Man and His Work, edited by L. S. Dembo (Madison, Milwaukee and London, 1967), pp. 45-56 (pp. 48-49). Yet when he compares Mary to Despair, he writes about the significance of

April 1 in Despair but appears to entirely miss its sly intrusion into the earlier novel. In my own account I am partly indebted to an unpublished MS by Alex de Jonge (New College, Oxford) which initially drew my attention to the significance of the dates on the doors.

12. King Queen Knave, Foreword, p.7.

13. Appel and Newman, pp. 293-309 (p.308).

14. Life in Art, pp. 152 and 153.

15. 1970 Foreword to 1971 edition of Glory, p.ix. All subsequent page references are to this edition. First published in Paris, 1933.

16. Op. cit., pp. 44-49.

17. Appel and Newman, p. 304.

18. 1963 Foreword to Bend Sinister, p. viii.

19. Bend Sinister, Foreword, p. ix.

20. Ibid.

21. Op. cit., p. viii.

22. Tom Jones, Book IV, Chapter 1, p. 151.

23. Berlin. All subsequent page references to New York and London edition, 1964.

24. First published in book form, 1938: see Nabokov Bibliography.

25. 1963 Penguin edition, p. 191.

26. Norfolk, Connecticut.

27. Strong Opinions, pp. 154-155.

28. 1964 Penguin edition, p. 60.

29. Strong Opinions, pp. 35-37.

30. See Appel 'Ada Described', for a very full and illuminating discussion of literary allusions and parodies. Nabokov himself described this piece as a 'brilliant essay' (Strong Opinions, p. 285) and all subsequent commentators, like myself, must owe it a substantial debt.

31. These notes were in fact added by Nabokov for the 1970 Penguin edition of the book.

32. 'Ada Described', footnote to p. 170.

33. See Nabokov's 'Reply to My Critics' (Strong Opinions, pp. 241-267) where he defends in great detail the precise literalism of his own translation of Puskhin's Eugene Onegin (New York 1964), and dismisses a critic's 'rapturous hope 'that Lowell might produce a rhyming version of Eugene Onegin as 'an infernal vision' (p. 243). See also Strong Opinions, p. 81 on 'arty paraphrase'. Clarence Brown well describes Nabokov's attitude to free translation (including Lowell's of Osip Mandelstam) in 'Nabokov's Pushkin and Nabokov's Nabokov', in Dembo, pp. 195-208.

34. New York, 1971.

35. Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to Ada (Ardis 1969). She writes of 'the conflict between Ada's natural needs and her incestuous experience ...In her relationship with Van, she has moved into a private, self-enclosed world, and away from normal, satisfying, healthful interactions with the external world.' In fact, Nabokov has never shown a high regard for other people's ideas of the 'normal' and 'healthful' and had some tart questions to ask Philip Oake about 'the world' too casually invoked by that interviewer. 'What world? Whose world? If we mean the average world of the average newspaper reader in Liverpool, Livorno or Vilno, then we are dealing in trivial generalities.' (Strong Opinions, pp. 135-136.)

36. Op. cit. (Ithaca and London, 1974) p. 201.

37. Pnin, 1957.

38. In The Defence.

39. In Lolita.

40. In Mary.

41. In Bend Sinister.

42. 'I do think that when you criticise people, one should take into account the quantity and quality of happiness that has been allotted to them. Quite a number of people are unfortunate people, neudachniki in the Russian sense, and I would not criticise these people in the same way I would a very, very, very successful poet ...' Nabokov in conversation, quoted by Field, Life in Part, p.29.

43. Op. cit., pp. 4-5 and p. 205

44. Bend Sinister, p. 210-217.

45. Invitation to a Beheading, p. 191.

46. Transparent Things (New York 1972), p. 73.

47. Speak Memory, p. 227.

48. Transparent Things, pp. 29, 24 and 75.

49. As Mr. R. tells us on p. 69. A secondary meaning of the adjective 'tralatitious' is 'Handed down from generation to generation, traditional' (OED) which fits well with Mr. R.'s flamboyant contempt for modern conventions and the plastic world.

50. See Strong Opinions, pp. 44, 80, 173.

51. 'A Path for the Future Novel', in Snapshots and Towards a New Novel, translated by Barbara Wright (1965) pp. 50-57 (pp. 53-57). All page references are to this edition. Towards a New Novel was first published in Paris, 1962.

52. In Snapshots..., pp. 75-95 (pp. 78-81).

53. Strong Opinions, pp. 194-196 (p. 196).

54. Hyde, op. cit., Chapter 9, pp. 201-206 (p.206).

55. Labyrinths, pp. 72-77.

56. I am indebted to Alex de Jonge's unpublished remarks for some of these correlations. See also Hyde, pp. 213-214.

57. For Nabokov on the ecstasies of butterfly-hunting, see Chapter 6 of Speak Memory (pp. 94-110): and as evidence of the scientific skill which accompanied the passion, see also the plate of 'Plebejus (Lysandra) cormion Nabokov', facing p. 123.

58. Life in Part, pp. 269-271. The Nabokovs enjoyed many collecting trips in the Rockies.

59. See e.g. OED, under 'Harlequin'.

60. Snapshots..., p. 53.

61. Strong Opinions, p. 153.

62. '...it all went into Ardis, my poor dead love...'(p.26). See also p. 63.

63. Even Field's own muted account of the differences between himself and Nabokov (in Life in Part,Chapter 1, obtruding passim) makes it clear that his biographical method was deeply offensive to Nabokov. In one of the hapless biographer's many would-be disarming confessions be claims the book to be 'free... from the fat of irrelevant fact' (p.5) - among the missing 'fat' are such facts as essential dates, linear chronology, an index and so forth. Here is Field on Field: 'The book you hold does not come with the recommendation of Vladimir Nabokov... I did not see clearly enough in the early years of work on this book [Nabokov's especial need

to be inaccessible to others]...and[this]...lies at the base of all the difficulties and differences of opinion between Nabokov and his first biographer...Nabokov sees his first biography as...an unsuccessful assault upon the radiant, glacial and final truth of Speak, Memory.' (pp. 27-28).

A little later, Field's criticism of Nabokov speaks volumes about himself: 'Vladimir Nabokov has never been satisfied with the mere possibility of truth, which is to his credit, but too often he has allowed himself to marshal his facts like an overconfident prosecutor' (p. 31). No such prosecutions in the limbo where most of Field's quotations float. Field records at least one 'short but sharp clash' before 1971, when the biography had been under way for over two years. This date makes especially interesting Nabokov's characterisation of a certain 'Mr. Tamworth of the brigand's beard', secretary to the author Mr. R. (a parody self-portrait of Nabokov) in Transparent Things, published in 1972 (p. 30).

In the deathbed letter of Mr. R., it is revealed that Tamworth had hoped to be Mr. R.'s biographer. 'As you know...he gnawed his way into all my affairs, crawling into every cranny, collecting every German-accented word of mine, so that now he can boswell the dead man just as he had bossed very well the living one' (p.83). It may not be insignificant that Field apparently approached Nabokov about the biography in the following terms: '...here I am... answering an unplaced ad to be your Boswell '(Life in Part, p.8). The picture on the back flap of the same work shows him to have a beard every bit as black and piratical as Tamworth's. The last bit of conjectural evidence one might adduce for identifying Field and Tamworth could seem fatuous with an author less fond of punning than Nabokov, but with a mind so fond of intricate word-games as his, nothing can be excluded. 'Tamworth' is not only what Mr. R. merrily tells us, to wit the name of a'"breed of black-blotched swine"' (Transparent Things, p. 31). It is also the first half of the name of an English village, 'Tamworth Field'. To press only a little further, that name is reminiscent of another, Bosworth Field: the name of a battle more epic and bloody than the 'short but sharp clash' Field speaks of - and a name which combines the syllables of Boswell, Tamworth and Field. It would be nice to think that Nabokov had thus, in a short text which will long outlive Field's pretentious and sloppy epic, had the last word against Field: and also against the high-powered literary industry Mr. R. understood so well in that same death-bed letter to his publisher ('So adieu, dear friend, and may your heir auction this off most profitably', p.82). Hard upon Nabokov's own death in 1977 Life in Part was rushed into print - one hopes not too profitably for anyone concerned.

64. Labyrinths, pp. 78-86.

65. Nabokov is an author characterised by such formidable formal intelligence, such labyrinthine and tireless ingenuity in his games with the reader, that the critic is rarely in danger of suggesting an interpretation of the text which will not at any rate have occurred to the author, if not actually incorporated by him into the text's intended range of meanings.

66. Transparent Things, p. 30.

67. Ada, p. 562.

68. See Strong Opinions, p. 197.

69. Transparent Things, p. 93.

70. See Note 21 to Chapter 2.

71. Ada, p. 295.

72. Ada, p. 571.

CHAPTER 4

SAMUEL BECKETT: DISMEMBERING THE LITERARY SELF, DISCOVERING 'HE'S ALL HUMANITY'[1]

> '"I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past. There seems to be a kind of aesthetic axiom that expression is achievement - must be an achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable ..."'[2]

The above quotation should make it clear from the outset what a very different kind of artist, and portrait of the artist, we shall find in the works of Samuel Beckett. My last chapter finished with the vision of Van, that most accomplished of verbal and intellectual acrobats, dancing on his hands. If one of Beckett's characters by chance was caught walking on his hands, it could only be out of hopeless ignorance as to how more orthodox walking was done, and impotence in any case to conform to the special norm for such procedures. Far more likely that the mature Beckett character will be found crawling through the mud: stuck still, either prone or supine: decomposing in a room or some other locked system, possibly just within the echoing confines of the skull. When I speak of 'dismembering the literary self', it is not just a polite metaphor, as we shall see. Beckett's men literally lose the use of their limbs quite regularly: and their bodily functions are usually the last thing they have to lose. Utterly unlike Nabokov's artist-heroes with their comfortable life-styles, accommodating women and achieved corpus of works, unlike Woolf's with their

country house-parties and sensitive friendships, Beckett insists that 'My characters have nothing.'[3] This is one of the things that makes Beckett's work so unusual and so interesting. True outcasts from the assured centre of polite culture, his characters are not only selfconscious about the business of narrating and language itself, they usually approach the whole edifice of accepted social behaviour with a kind of alienated disbelief that throws a great deal of light upon the artificial ballet of middle-class politesse.

LATH was a metaphor of confinement, for all its sunlight and cavorting harlequins: Beckett is conventionally thought of as the poet of enclosed spaces, but despite the literal accuracy of this description, he in fact contrives a miraculous escape for self-conscious art from the possible constrictions of élitism, self-indulgence, incestuousness. He did this by a much more radical and extended development of Woolf's thesis in Between the Acts, to the effect that the artist is linked in his creativity to the creative urge in the most ordinary people, Candish the butler carefully placing the yellow rose or Mrs. Sands flouring fish in the kitchen. Beckett's artistic philosophy led him likewise increasingly to analogise the selfconscious artist's problems in making patterns which he knows to be only provisionally true with the self-doubt of the layman, struggling to contain the mess of his life and give shape to the flux with patterned speech. His artistic practice was entirely consistent: in the end he abandoned the traditional novel completely and moved from the privacy of the

page into the theatre, into a space where the drama of self-consciousness could be enacted at a midpoint between the maker and his audience, who are thus much more directly requested to invest in the drama of selfconsciousness their own immediate and feeling selves.

Beckett's selfconsciousness can truly be said to be more 'critical' than that of either Woolf or Nabokov. Both of them in their personal creative lives were only lightly touched by the problems of the novel which my first chapter suggested currently afflict literature and help to make its practitioners uncomfortably selfconscious: economic difficulities, problems of a narrow or vanishing audience, radical doubts about the humanistic function of literature and growing uncertainty about the worth of interiority and the individualistic self. Nabokov in his last work shows himself to be entirely self-aware about the labyrinthine and grossly distortive nature of the literary and literary-critical industry in this century: but it is the somewhat detached view of á writer who writes within his sunlit and well-furnished studio. He has known enormous success according to that industry's lights and never seems to have questioned the ultimate value and beauty of writing, 'the monstrous delights of novelistic invention'.[4] It may be partly because he was insulated from much twentieth-century cultural angst by his inheritance of a body of liberal-aristocratic, fiercely individualistic values which drab exile seems to have thrown into bright relief, and by the reinforcing circle of creative and well-educated emigré Russians who kept their culture alive through a number of periodicals eager for new writing like his.

Woolf was protected from the difficulties of publication by owning her own publishing house. In Bloomsbury she knew a supportive circle of like-minded literati among whom individual friendship, love and creativity were the unquestioned values: and in pre-World War II England as a whole the worth of a liberal arts was not seriously questioned, for the anarchy and self-disgust of Dada and Surrealism had hardly made an impact at all.

Beckett is entirely different. Where Woolf's and Nabokov's artist-portraits (those at least which are disguised self-portraits) are always affectionate and transfigured by a deep belief in art, qualified at worst by gentle irony about the surface absurdities of the profession, Beckett expresses violent self-disgust. In More Pricks Than Kicks (1934) and Murphy (1938), his first two novels, he mordantly ridicules the verbose pedant full of esoteric allusions and Joycean word-play which he nevertheless himself was, at the start of his writing career. He had learned very well the lessons of the Surrealists, with whose work he had extensive contact in Paris in the late 1920s and early 1930s:[5] and for a long time his vision of the world was of positively Dadaistic ferocity, insisting on man's animality and absurdity and pouring ridicule on man's aspirations to be a god-like maker. Yet he himself continued to be afflicted by a compulsion to write and to make, and real horror about the inappropriateness of conventional novelistic proceedings to the chaos of actual human life drove him to ever more radical disintegrations of the novel form. Finally, he started to work in the theatre where once again his intensely critical insistence on not taking easy descriptive formulae for

granted led to equally revolutionary experiments with form. Looking at all Beckett's work in its immense formal variety, a remarkably consistent motivating force seems to be the desire to escape from the professional caste of writers, literary men, academics, solitary intellectuals, without ever ceasing to write, or wanting to write about writing.

He managed this in the end by demonstrating that the desire to narrate is a fundamental human activity, and can be portrayed on stage as such through lay characters and in language which is not obscure. In this way he could escape from the lonely impasse of LATH where the selfconscious intellect was characterised by its unremitting awareness of isolation from the rest of the world, locked in a private hall of receding mirrors, a hell of echoes which only the maker and his faithful exegetes could hear. Having in a sense rehabilitated the artist by finding him to be only a more articulate and orderly specimen of 'all humanity', Beckett seems to have been salved of his self-disgust, and he can in the end portray his narrators with compassion. He tried to move art back into some genuinely communal area of experience by showing that paradoxically, lonely selfconsciousness was one of the things all mankind had in common. More, he accepts in his work the burden of all the pain and mess and misery which more decorous literary art has been accused of ignoring and indeed blatantly flouting in its consoling grace. To the question, what good are books to so many men who have nothing? Beckett responds by putting men who 'have nothing' in his books - not quite an answer, but an honourable move. In this way his art has effectively faced and defused the

crisis which threatens all literary activity in a century which is suspicious of individual privilege and individual achievement. But the road between More Pricks Than Kicks and the quiet resolution of That Time over forty years later is long and for the most part very much wilder than anything in my other two writers' artistic development.

The necessary length and violence of the process of dismembering the literary self on which Beckett engaged is comprehensible when one considers the kind of extravagantly privileged, cultured, flamboyant and idiosyncratic selfhood with which Beckett began. The story of his artistic development is a monument to the extent to which conscious decision (albeit a decision to use the reserves of the unconscious self), tireless observation and criticism of the self, can completely reshape a man linguistically and philosophically. In this sense Beckett is the ultimate example of the Lukácsian postfeudal individual characterised in my first chapter (pp.19-23), exiled - in his case choosing exile - from the unthinking anonymity of communal life, consciously developing his separate and unique sense of self on the extreme edge of society. Only this kind of severance perhaps can free the artist from his unthinking allegiance to certain isolating habits of privilege and culture, and allow him in the end to resume a real identity with a much wider range of men. To achieve this eventual re-integration Beckett also had to slough off all the defiantly eccentric superficies of obfuscating dazzle which supported him in his first departures from social and literary convention. As I argued in my first chapter (pp.97-99) to individuate oneself so aggressively

is to rebel against the existing mean: in his case, against the Irish literary heritage, the Protestant ethic of rational morality, the established order of narration, and even in the end the axiom that most artists, including the two selfconscious artists I have examined in most depth, have accepted without question - 'that expression is achievement, - must be an achievement'. Having made that initial rejection, Beckett is the end gave his early and isolated act of rebellion public meaning by forcing his own experimental literary forms into a shape which could deal with 'impotence' and 'ignorance', the areas of grey pain, silence and obscurity which most artists do not consider to be suitable material but which nevertheless are the dim theatres where the great mass of men, sleeping, dreaming, waiting, worrying, failing, spend most of their lives.

Beckett's youth combined academic brilliance and personal charisma. On the academic front, he passed out first of his year in the 1927 list of First Class Honours students in Modern Languages at Trinity College Dublin, and was seconded to the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris for two years preparatory to taking up a lectureship at TCD in 1930. In 1931 he published his short but elaborately erudite critical study, Proust: his career must have seemed set fair for a youthful professorship. Instead, he abandoned his lectureship without warning in December 1931 - the first of many significant acts of renunciation, a renunciation of the sphere where cleverness reigned supreme in its own right. Later on the speech of Lucky in Waiting for Godot would

offer a dreadful warning against the meaningless sterility of pedantry divorced from content:

> Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattman of a personal God quaquaquaqua... who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown...as a result of the labours left unfinished crowned by the Acacacacademy of Anthropopop-ometry of Easy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all doubt...[6]

Nothing is ever established by this tidal wave of words except that men may 'shrink and dwindle' among all this nonsense and that there are 'labours abandoned left unfinished',[7] as were Beckett's own in Acacacacademic life. Some of the reasons for the renunciation lie in those two years in Paris and Beckett's activities there outside the Ecole Normale.

Paris was at the time a melting-pot of modernist ideas with the Surrealist movement fermenting quarrels, love affairs and revolution in the cafes when they were not upsetting the decorum of the bourgeois sentence at their writing-desks. Slightly later on Beckett would be as intimately involved with their writing as only a translator can be: he was the especially-commended translator of twenty-one of the poems in the 'Surrealist Number' of <u>This Quarter</u> published in September 1932.[8] Beckett was notable for his good looks and even as much dandyism as poverty would allow, attracting the amorous attention of James Joyce's daughter Lucia and the heiress Peggy Guggenheim who later described his clothes as 'very French and tight-fitting'.[9] Most important, he became an intimate friend and occasional dogsbody of Joyce himself, at the time of course the possessor of unrivalled mystique among the

avant-garde. He contributed an indicatively-titled scholarly piece, 'Dante...Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', to the critical symposium on Joyce, Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (1929). In the same year he began a task which could have deterred a less intellectually self-confident man, the translation into French of Joyce's 'Anna Livia Plurabelle', part of A Work in Progress (later of course Finnegans Wake.) He was also working on his own creative writing, mainly poems and some short prose with a Joycean flavour, publishing a short story, 'Assumption', in transition in 1929.[10] In 1930 he won a £10 literary prize with the punning poem, 'Whoroscope', which as an indicator of artistic personality can only be described as showily allusive, or, as the prize-giver Nancy Cunard more mildly expressed it, 'mysterious, obscure in parts... clearly by someone intellectual and highly educated'.[11] Clearly, in short, signed by Samuel Beckett at a time when the advertisement of his own intelligence was not an enterprise shot through with disgust and despair. Cunard and her fellow judge Richard Aldington decided that the poem would be incomprehensible without notes, which Beckett accordingly wrote for the published edition. 'Whoroscope' itself (ninety-eight lines long) had been composed in less than twelve hours on the closing date of the competition, an act of considerable intellectual nerve and typical of the young Beckett.

In the spring vacation of 1931 he had four poems accepted by Samuel Putnam for an anthology and, according to Deirdre Bair, the blurb that went with them was supplied by Beckett himself:

> 'Samuel Beckett is the most interesting of the younger Irish writers. He is a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and has lectured at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. He has a great knowledge of Romance literature, is a friend of Rudmose-Brown and of Joyce, and had adopted the Joyce method to his poetry with original results...'[12]

The self-advertising nature of these remarks is not so very surprising in a young poet trying to establish his name on the literary scene, but they sound very oddly from the point of view of our retrospective knowledge of Beckett as the writer who refuses to comment on his work, who gave up academic life in despair, and who has subsequently eschewed personal publicity so fiercely that the some half-dozen interviews he has given in his whole life have perforce been filleted and quoted again and again by critics. However, this incongruous piece of early self-description reflects a real truth: as a young man Beckett knew a kind of personal eminence and artistic acceptance which would not be repeated until he was in his late middle age, and the factors which sent him into the wilderness were largely a question of his own uncompromising choices.

Despite Beckett's abandonment of his Dublin lectureship and the academic world in 1931, a strongly academic and precious flavour remained in the creative world of prose that replaced it. Moving restlessly between Germany, Paris and Dublin he wrote a strongly autobiographical and never published novel, A Dream of Fair Women:[13] then he reworked and augmented the same material into a series of short stories which were finally published in 1934 as More Pricks Than Kicks.[14] The work is of a piece with the kaleidoscopic fragments of early life I have assembled. It consists of an episodic ramble around (and briefly after) the life of a

dilettante student and literary man, Belacqua Shuah: he studies Dante, he attends literary parties despite an already well-developed contempt for the literary fraternity, he is pursued by grotesque women, he longs for the peace of the Portrane Lunatic Asylum, he drinks, puns and broods. He is already something of a drop-out, likely to attract the unfavourable attention of policemen and to arrive at literary parties in a disreputable condition. Nevertheless, it is to a literary world that he emphatically belongs, as we can see from the recondite allusiveness of the language. He talks elaborately and incessantly. Only the constants of Balacqua's character hold the book together: there is no real narrative thread, and the style and tone flicker from one parody to another. The book is Belacqua, which means that it is divided against itself. The critical nature of Beckett's selfconsciousness is apparent from the first: he is aware of the irritating preciosity of the book's prose, and he tries to palm it off on his hero, an ironised version of the Irish man of letters Beckett had just decided not to be.

Thus it is Belacqua, and not his author, in theory, who is shown to have 'a strong weakness for oxymoron' (p.36): a little later, 'the reader is requested to take notice that this sweet style is Belacqua's' (p.41). Nevertheless, Belacqua's style in all its undirected virtuosity directs the vehicle which contains so that Beckett's first book gives us a portrait of the artist drowning in verbiage. This early work is frequently clever without the saving grace of seriousness, or wit, or any kind of life, demonstrating only 'the last phase of...[Belacqua's] solipsism' (p.35)

and saying quite a lot about its author's and that of the avant-garde which nurtured him. The prose postures and shows off just as the arty underworld which Belacqua inhabits postures and shows off, and in the end the reader longs to escape. Beckett apparently felt the same way, yet his pen full of Latinisms and Joycean prolixity bears him onwards against his will:

> 'The bicuspid' from the Ovoidologist 'monotheistic fiction ripped by the sophists, Christ and Plato, from the violated matrix of pure reason.'
> Who shall silence them, at last? Who shall circumsise their lips from speaking, at last? (p.72)

These last questions have the ring of authentic weariness and desperation which will later become the dominant note in e.g. The Unnamable (1953). Beckett's final judgement on the tiresomeness of youthful literary exuberance comes early in the text: '[Belacqua] was an impossible person in the end. I gave him up...because he was not serious.' (p.36) And indeed Belacqua does die by authorial decree on the surgeon's table. Death comes suddenly and with a merciful lack of words, but one of those, typically, is obscure:

> 'By Christ! he did die!
> They had clean forgotten to auscultate him!' (p.157)

A key phrase applied to Belacqua is 'his precious ipsissimosity' - Beckett's apt coinage to denote those precious and often Latinate eccentricities which make him himself and in turn dictate the flavour of More Pricks Than Kicks. That phrase also distils the essence of the young Beckett in his public role: fierce individualism, eccentric display, an arrogantly exclusive sense of self. During the decades of little money and less success which followed Beckett's renunciation of his first brilliant career option, this 'ipsissimosity' would by stages shed its showiness and its garlands of verbal excess.

His next novel, Murphy (mostly written in 1935 and 1936, but not published until 1938[15]) is mainly set in London, where the author had been living in some hardship. It is still extremely Irish in flavour however, as its title suggests, and the vocabulary and jokes still sometimes suggest a verbal dandy out on parade in all his finery. The reader is stopped short by words like 'genustuprations', 'eleutheromania', 'viridescent', 'panpygoptic', 'apnoea', 'desinvolture' and other rare gems from giant dictionaries. Simplicity is not to be found even at foundation-level in Murphy's ironical and distanced universe, for his idiosyncratic theory of creation states that 'In the beginning was the pun' (p.41). If this is so then clearly we are looking at the created structure of a selfconscious human intellect, rather than any divinely-created 'natural order' of reality. The artist revealed by Murphy is still both bookishly clever and youthfully proud of it: yet the portrait has gained greatly in depth. This time the world of the book is larger, graver and more disturbing than that cleverness. As in More Pricks than Kicks the book outlives the death of its hero, but this time some of the cast who remain behind are indicatively different in demeanour from the dramatis personae of Beckett's first novel. In More Pricks than Kicks Belacqua was survived by an obscene and unlikely widow, the Smeraldina, her anthropoid new consort, Hairy Quinn, and a supposed groundsman who debates in the book's last pages whether the scene be classical or romantic, deciding it is both:

> A classico-romantic working-man therefore. The words of the rose to the rose floated up in his mind: 'No gardener has dies, comma, within rosaceous memory.'... So it goes in the world. (p.173)

The author of Murphy by contrast shows himself quite aware that this is not how it goes in the real world, and that ordinary human being are not so infatuated as this articulate rose with points of punctuation and polysyllables.

Murphy does have hints of a literary past and hopes of a literary future: he 'never ripped up old stories' (p.14). He has a vocabulary to match, and a pronounced inclination to philosophy. He is described as a 'chronic emeritus' (p.16). Nevertheless, he is not just Belacqua raised from the operating table. He is more complex, more tragic and further removed from social normality than Belacqua. He gives full literal value to the colloquial expression 'drop-out' that I applied more casually to Belacqua: Murphy is seen in the process of dropping far far out and beyond recall, just as in some senses his author behind him had (Hugh Kenner says that Beckett 'dropped into nothingness' after giving up his lectureship.[16]) Unlike Belacqua but exactly like his author Murphy is in exile from his Irishness in London. Whereas Belacqua only had 'his heart' in the Portrane Lunatic Asylum (p.25), Murphy actually consigns himself bodily to the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat as a nurse, a nurse moreover who instantly strikes up a fraternal affinity with the patients: 'here was the race of people he had long since despaired of finding' (p.97) His commitment to them is real, and he acts upon it: his inability to meet the orthodox demands of the world outside is equally real, and he acts upon that. Despite the troupe of stage Irishmen who supply the comic business of the book, Murphy himself is authentic where Belacqua was a spoof: and despite the authorial disclaimer to the effect that all the other

characters are puppets (p.71), Celia the warm-hearted prostitute who nearly loses her looks and her reason through her love for Murphy is authentic and believable also.

Deprived of Belacqua's degree of authorial indulgence, Murphy becomes the butt of an unimpressed working world: the 'chronic emeritus' is viewed with humorous contempt by Celia when he starts to excuse his initial jobless state by a little philosophy about being and doing - '"I have heard bilge", she said, and did not bother to finish.' (p.25) This is not to deny the power of Murphy's solipsistic, shadowy imaginative universe with its refined delicacy of surface argument and undertow of panic and despair. It holds the reader, as Belacqua's does not, by its obsessive internal logic, its elegant rejection of the banalities of the work ethic and the serious claim it makes for the joys of retreat from communal normality and competition into solitude and stasis. But the tragicomic drama of this book, the narrative force lacking in its predecessors, is due to the confrontation it stages between the world of intellect and imagination with its tendency to solipsism and the real world outside, oppressively demanding that Murphy join up and join in. Murphy's 'eyes, cold and unwavering as a gull's' (p.26) may be very similar to Beckett's,[17] but the author is by now able to step right outside the self he portrays and see Murphy in objective terms as an isolated grotesque, at first incomprehensible to the commonsense intelligence of Celia, at the end 'horribly reduced, obscured and distorted' in the reflecting eye of Mr. Endon, the schizophrenic patient who Murphy deluded himself was a friend, but in fact was quite unable to focus him (p.140). Beckett shows

himself very sensitive to the effect of Murphy's prolix style upon the uneducated ear:

> Celia felt, as she felt so often with Murphy, spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. It was like difficult music heard for the first time. (p.27)

This vividly evokes the initial difficulties of reading many passages of Beckett, and is evidence that Beckett unlike many difficult authors does not labour under the illusion that his meaning is always crystal-clear or his self-portraits sympathetic. Selfconsciousness should include this kind of perception of possible audience reaction to the artistic self on display. The reactions of Celia and Bom and Ticklepenny and the rest to Murphy are really a kind of dramatisation of a putative orthodox reader to Beckett, and they show his awareness that the intellectual will not easily woo the world by subtle velleities of speech. As a specimen viewed in isolation, Murphy is fascinating: as a social animal he is the object of a few quirky private passions, but mostly of public irritation and contempt. It seems that Beckett shared the irritation and the weariness. He had wearied of the 'impossible' Belacqua in the end (p.36): Murphy also has to go as Beckett's self-presentation becomes bleaker, eager to identify with those with far more radical disadvantages than those of the 'chronic emeritus'.

Though neither Belacqua nor Murphy are very happy men, they do have their compensations, to wit a certain intellectual self-satisfaction very foreign to subsequent Beckett heroes. Belacqua's 'ipsissimosity' was 'precious' to him: in place of that with Murphy

we have the 'Amor intellectualis quo se ipsum amat' - the intellectual love with which he loved himself. (p.63). But that intellectual love is shown to be inadequate to keep Murphy warm. He needs a heater, whose malfunction kills him: and when his romantic vision of madness fails him, he needs some contact with those he once loved with a non-intellectual love, and their defection terrifies him.

> He...tried to get a picture of Celia. In vain. Of his mother. In vain. Of his father...In vain...never before had he failed with his father. He saw the clenched and rigid upturned face of the Child in a Giovanni Bellini Circumcision, waiting to feel the knife...He could not get a picture in his mind of any creatures he had met, animal or human. Scraps of bodies...lines and colours evoking nothing rose and vanished out of sight before him...(p.141)

Murphy's kind of intellect divorced from feeling analyses until it can see nothing whole, so that the human form becomes just a series of 'lines and colours evoking nothing': Celia's kind of feeling divorced from intellect grasps at essentials directly and impatiently, but cannot communicate with Murphy in retreat. Beckett is dramatising a conflict within his own artistic personality which at this stage was too selfconsciously suspicious of easy emotional effects to write of emotion without an undercutting intellectual commentary. His work would have been in a sense neutered if he had not, in writing the Trilogy during the 1940s, managed to let his own feeling voice emerge: '"Only then did I begin to write the things I feel"', he told Gabriel d'Aubarède,[18] and throughout the drama he would continue to try to resolve the conflict, exploring the emotions of his characters without the lacerating mockery of his first two novels.

In dramatising this conflict Beckett is not only portraying a

personal artistic conflict: it is a conflict inherent in the aesthetics of a century which followed after that of the great Romantics and their sometimes lesser, more sentimental inheritors. In Beckett's work typically the mockery and distrust of sentiment is much more explosive and brutal than in Woolf's or Nabokov's, but both of them show something of the same unease. Thus Nabokov concocted the deliberately chill and coarse sexual acrobatics of King Queen Knave in reaction against his own tendency to 'human humidity'[19]: and Woolf in Night and Day reviews with considerable irony the passionate excesses of William Rodney, who feels that 'Literature was a fresh garland of spring flowers' and is 'afloat upon a sea of unknown and tumultuous possibilities' when he considers the 'melodious and whimsical temperament' of his equally romantic mate Cassandra.[20] The emotional and instinctual self is a natural and frequent target for the critical scrutiny of the selfconscious intellect, especially when the form emotion takes and the licence for its free expression comes from a Romantic cultural tradition which the selfconscious writer in some ways sought to disrupt. Beckett is aware however of the dangers of distrusting emotion. Initially refusing to feel the conventional sentiments which the world expects of him, Murphy ends up unable to feel anything at all. When the gas leaks into his room and sheer brute contingency puts an end to his retreat, the 'big world' against which he had long ago decided reasserts its power over the alienated 'little world' of his solipsism (p.101): but in so doing, the external fact of disaster simply reflects the chaos which has already shattered the images in his 'little world'. Hoping to find solace there, he found instead a chill and lonely anaesthesia which the eventual gas only

makes material.

Earlier in the book he had pondered hopefully a possible etymological link between gas and chaos. The etymology is unlikely, but the link in terms of Beckett's aesthetic is clear enough. Much later he would speak of the artist's duty to find a form 'of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else...a form that accommodates the mess...'[21] Murphy's fine-drawn philosophical parameters are shown to be quite incapable of accommodating the chaotic facts of the 'big world'. Murphy the 'chronic emeritus' cannot deal with chaos: it leaks in through his net of words and obliterates the thinker. Beckett makes it clear that the 'big world' is indeed bigger, stronger, sadder and more violently random than the rarefied world created by solitary intellectual self-love. The book's last scene vividly depicts the world which outlives Murphy and the real pain and exhaustion of those who survive: Celia and Mr. Kelly are the prototypes of the kind of people on whose Beckett's art would finally center. Back at her old trade and bereft of her beloved Murphy, pushing her aged and ghastly-looking grandfather (in turn bereft of his beloved kite), Celia starts the long battle back from the park as the park-keeper's inexorable voice announces to all of the living that the day is over:

> There was no shorter way home. They yellow hair fell across her face. The yachting-cap clung like a clam to her skull. The levers were the tired heart. She closed her eyes. <u>All out</u>. (p.158)

These terse sentences, this bleak lyricism, show how far Beckett had come from the intrusive literary ego that bedevilled the post

mortem scene in More Pricks than Kicks, denying any reality to either life or death with Belacqua's corpse lying 'between [Hairy and the Smeraldina]...like the water between Buda and Pest, and so on, hyphen of reality' (p.165). Murphy on the other hand is 'not a puppet' (p.71) as we are assured, and his death brings us into contact with real human suffering through Celia's reaction, not just another literary transition, hyphen or full-stop. By portraying an artist as caricatural and frivolous as Belacqua, Beckett not only discourages serious thought about the nature of art and the relation of the artist to social reality, he actually scorns it, treating art with as much contempt as he does the emotions. With the portrait of Murphy, unproductive and laughable though he in many ways may be, Beckett begins to consider seriously the problems of the intellectual trying to relate to an everyday working world, the tensions between the urgings of mind and heart, mind and body. He also broaches the subject which will later be central to the plays, that of the difficulties of language when men speak so very differently and yet expect to be understood the same: Murphy tries to make himself understood, and Celia from her side of the gap tries harder, before he gives up and retreats into silence. Moreover in his physical circumstances he has declined nearer to the eventual archetype of the Beckettian tramp. The hero of Beckett's next novel and the last written in English, Watt (written in 1945 but not published until 1953)[22] is nearer still.

Watt has entirely adopted the external guise of a broken-down clown, though by repute he was once a 'university man' (p.21), and

his dogged, pathetic persistence in pursuing his attempts to understand the world has something of the academic's naive belief that knowledge is both possible, and good. The text persistently proves him wrong. He looks like 'a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with cord' (p.14) and he 'has a huge big red nose' (p.20). First introduced as a man who has owed five shillings for seven years and even now has only four and fourpence to pay his debts, acting for most of the narrative as a menial servant who totally accepts the authority of the mysterious system he serves in the house of a Mr. Knott, he is an innocent abroad, humbly investigating the dark riddles of a sophisticated world and offering himself as its butt through his own helpless physical absurdity - 'Watt had watched people smile and thought he understood how it was done' (p.23). Belacqua and Murphy were already inept enough in terms of social grace and worldly success to suggest the problematic and artificial nature of these things which most civilised men accept as an automatic possession: but Watt is not so much an alienated intellectual as a complete social outcast. In the third part of the novel we discover that by the presumed time of the book's execution he is incarcerated in an unspecified asylum where he has told his story to the book's actual narrator, 'Sam', a neighbouring inmate (pp. 149-151). In every respect this portrait of the artist is one stage further down the line than Balacqua or Murphy. For it <u>is</u> a portrait of the artist, though not the kind of articulate and cultured artist we are used to: it is the history of Watt's desperate attempts to make some communicable sense of the endless puzzle of his life. <u>Watt</u> is an extraordinary

novel and cannot be fitted easily into any pattern of development other than its own, which in turn would take many hundreds of pages to trace. Nevertheless one may briefly state that it is two paradoxical things. First, it documents Beckett's obsessive interest in the swarming possibilities of language divorced from function, language as philosophical game, the kind of thing which threatened to paralyse the narrative of the first two novels, as well as their heros, but here almost achieves that paralysis. Secondly, however, Watt represents the unprivileged layman, as Murphy could not, in his helpless incomprehension and inability to make progress: and the book marks the first major appearance of the simple, colloquial language Beckett would eventually use to such advantage in the plays.

> You remember Grehan? said Mr. Hackett.
> The poisoner, said the gentleman.
> The solicitor, said Mr. Hackett.
> I knew him slightly, said the gentleman. Six years, was it not.
> Seven, said Mr. Hackett. Six are rarely given. (p.8)

In its brevity and balance and especially in the repeated and formulaic identification of the speakers, the first section of the novel is very like the script of a play. But in Watt it stands out in sharp relief against the main mass of verbiage.

The obsession with language as a self-propagating lichen swarming over the immediate reality of things and over his own white pages is an occupational hazard for the novelist. Language is the medium in which he is immersed as a skilled technician, working on his own and without an immediate audience such as theatre-work or indeed ordinary speech supply: it is easy therefore for mere

virtuosity to get out of hand, or for the gap between the text and the world, the literary monologue and more ordinary acts of communication, to become dauntingly great. The risk is obviously more acute for a novelist as selfconscious as Beckett, hyper-aware of the mechanics of construction, perpetually insisting that he is providing an artefact of words and not a window on the world. Watt aches and falters with the exhaustion and absurdity of teasing out the long line of words. Only once again, in The Unnamable, will Beckett demonstrate so clearly the way in which conventional novelistic acts of explanation and description can literally immobilise the artist with no faith in the world he explains and describes. In life, though the theoretical possible number of narrative moves, and combination of moves, is limitless, the factual rush of history and the selectiveness of memory simplifies the story that emerges at the end of the day, for public and practical purposes. However, in Beckett's kind of art, where the world of his making is deliberately distanced from the active world of clock-time, the possible variations on every narrative move are literally endless, because the novelist does not merely explain or describe, he invents, and invention is as limitless as the potential alternatives which language offers. In the end, pointless plethora of statement can become absence of statement:

> Here he moved, to and fro, from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the window ; from the fire to the bed, from the bed to the fire; from the bed to the fire, from the fire to the bed; from the fire to the door, from the door to the fire; from the window to the bed, from the bed to the window; from the bed to the window, from the window to the bed...(p.203)

This goes on for more than a page until the stream of words works

something like the inexorable 'white sound' which erases all sound,

and there are many similar examples. Indeed, this is the characteristic mode of Watt and in its dogged repetitiveness and intractability it gives the impression of being much more deliberate than the earlier novels. There we had semi-confessional self-scrutiny by an idiosyncratic Beckettian persona, and linear narrative progression was blocked by the author's arabesques of style. Here the narrative high-road is blocked by the endless piles of simpler verbal building-blocks which offer themselves to the story-teller, and there is a controlled and fanatically thorough attempt to examine the more universal dilemma of narrative.

The central matter that the book narrates is a tissue of hypothesis: it is about 'the long supposition, the long dwindling supposition, that constituted Watt's experience in Mr. Knott's house' (p.130). Watt is really the personified question that his name suggests, the epitome of the naive narrator. His status as an outsider both vis-à-vis the secrets of the narrative and the secrets of acceptable social behaviour bring him near to the kind of 'impotence and ignorance' which fascinated Beckett. It is very dim inside Mr. Knott's house, very dark, and language illuminates nothing. The language of narration is a voluminous and unwieldy net to be tested at every point: straining to understand, the reader constantly falls right through, together with an escaping detail or concept. In Murphy Beckett still sometimes used language for bravura descriptive effect, as in the startling evocation of Mr. Endon's tiny hairy body in its scarlet, black and purple, (p.105) or, more rarely, for effects of measured lyrical beauty - 'that

unction of soft sunless light on her eyes that was all...[Celia] remembered of Ireland' (p.157). In Watt words are never unction, and the beauty of light is gone. Thus the world of physical phenomena is either a grey and nameless void:-

> For there we have to do with events that resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them, when they recurred, though it seems probable that they recurred no more, at the period of Watt's revelation ...but were as though they had never been...(pp.75-76)

or else is so overloaded with attributes and qualifications that no single picture emerges, as is the case with the book's central mystery, Mr. Knott:

> For one day Mr. Knott would be tall, fat, pale and dark, and the next thin, small, flushed and fair, and the next sturdy, middle-sized, yellow and ginger, and the next small, fat, pale and fair, and the next middle-sized, flushed, thin and ginger, and the next tall, yellow dark and sturdy...and so on for two whole pages. (p.209)

So much for adjectives, such passages suggest, so much for the telling phrase and precise detail on which the conventionally accomplished narrator prides himself. It is not surprising then that beauty has vanished from this world together with the hope of clarity. Lyrical effects are only used in contexts where the effect is one of deep irony, such as the description of the asylum gardens where Watt and Sam persecute the birds - and wax touchingly sentimental over the rats:

> Birds of every kind abounded, and these it was our delight to pursue, with stones and clods of earth. Robins, in particular, thanks to their confidingness, we destroyed in great numbers. And larks' nests, laden with eggs still warm from the mother's breast, we ground into fragments, under our feet, at the appropriate season of the year...
>
> But our particular friends were the rats, that dwelt by

> the stream. They were long and black...we brought them...birds' eggs, and frogs, and fledgelings...
>
> It was on these occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we came nearest to God. (p.153)

In which case, it must be assumed that God and the conventions of pastoral lyricism are not what they were. Here we have for once a perfectly recognisable fictional mode, but any relief that we feel is quickly dispelled when we realise the full inappropriateness of the material to which it is applied. In the linguistic world of Watt nothing is safe, especially overtures which promise pleasure: the lyrical formula may suddenly degrade in mid-sentence into mocking bathos -

> These north-western skies are really extraordinary, said Goff, are they not.
> So voluptuous, said Tetty. You think it is all over and then pop! up they flare, with augmented radiance. (p.13)

Pop! Up in our faces it flies, the foolish elastic at the back of the splendid bowtie. According to author Aidan Higgins, Beckett once compared literary style to 'a bowtie about a throat cancer'.[23] In Watt the cancer is eating away at the tie.

Language seems to be fatally ill, requiring intensive care from author and reader, suffering blood-lettings of wild hilarity or malignant growths of reiteration. Its prevailing condition tends towards the stunned and lame, as if a man being interrogated under torture were playing for time:

> For the incident of the Galls father and son was the first and type of many. And the little that is known about it has not yet all been said. Much has been said, but not all.
>
> Not that many things remain to be said, on the subject of the Galls father and son, for they do not. For only three or four things remain to be said, in this connexion.

> And three or four things are not really many, in comparison with the number of things that might have been known, and said, on this subject, and now never shall.

In fact as far as we know the only pressure being put upon the narrating voice is the unbearable strain of constructing a narrative at all, drawing some kind of recognisable pattern out of the mist using an instrument, language, which gradually reveals itself more and more deceptive. It takes a final leap into the dark when Watt starts breaking it down via several varieties of sentence-, phrase-, word-, and even letter-order, and then the real fog begins to overwhelm the possibility of statement:

> Now till up, little seen so oh, little heard so oh. Night till morning from. Heard I this, saw I this then what. Thing quiet, dim. Ears, eyes failing now also. Hush in, mist in, moved I so. (p.162)

Disentangle the inversion (relatively simple in this example) and it becomes clear that despite the wit with which Beckett consistently formulates the dilemma, the absurd moulds in which he cases Watt's plight, he is dealing with a serious problem, the difficulty which the honest narrator must feel in making hard-edged statements about a world which is largely mysterious to him - 'Up till now, oh so little seen, oh so little heard.'

The individual difficulties of each part of the narrative, and sometimes each interminably comma-ed sentence, are so great that it is easy to lose track of the enormity of the whole complex of imponderables which beset a linear reading. To schematise this complex: the story is narrated for us by 'Sam', who is mad enough to be in an asylum. He is frequently defeated by inadequate knowledge

of a point of substance or by a deficiency of vocabulary, and a dubious word will be represented by a bland '?' in the text, thus: 'Watt had a poor healing skin, and perhaps his blood was deficient in ?'(p.30). For larger failures there is the occasional 'Hiatus in MS.' (p.238). Sam also admits to 'fatigue and disgust' with the whole business of narrating (p.247). But Sam is only retailing to us what was told to <u>him</u> by Watt. Watt was also mad at the period of telling his tale, and was subject to the speech disorders already mentioned, which reached their peak with him inverting the order

> ... of the letters in the word together with that of the words in the sentence together with that of the sentence in the period. For example:
> <u>Dis yo dis, nem owt. Yad la, tin fo trap. Skin, skin, skin</u>...(p.166)

and so on. Small wonder that Sam drily remarks 'It took me some time to get used to this.' Moreover, it was not only Watt's perceptual faculties that were failing at the time: Sam also is losing his hearing. This is unfortunate, since Watt's articulation is even at the best of times 'rapid and ... muffled' (p.162). However, all this is mere mechanical failure compared to the fundamental problem that Watt is describing matters perfectly obscure to him, since he has never understood the logic which lay behind the operations of Mr. Knott's house, where most of the events in the book took place. And the final problem is that the operations of Mr. Knott's house really do seem to be as arbitrary and obscure as Watt finds them. This schema has of course read <u>Watt</u> at a literal level as only a schema can. <u>Watt</u> really consists of a single infinitely unwinding skein of words: Mr. Knott's house is one of the over-elaborate 'mansions' (p.149) of Watt's imagination, and Watt

one of the most tenuous fictional tenants of Beckett's. Nevertheless it is important sometimes to reclaim one's attention from the focus of a single knot and remember the truly appalling complexity of the narrative postulates from which the web is hung.

There are many dangers for the critic in providing an analysis of Watt. First, the analysis may be extracted from the book but it is not the book. Raymond Federman in his critical study of the novels, Journey to Chaos,[24] is fully aware that Watt in some senses represents Beckett's assertion of the power of that 'chaos' in the face of the methodical incursions of the ordering intellect.

> [Watt] attempts to apprehend an irrational and unrealistic universe with intellectual tools (reason, logic and conventional language) which serve the inhabitants of a real world, and even those of a traditional fiction... but which no longer function in the absurd environment of the Knott world.(p.107)

And yet, only a dozen pages earlier Federman has given an account of Watt which confidently applies just such 'intellectual tools' and ends up with something far removed from the actual experience of reading the book:

> In Watt ... the characters ... can be segregated into three distinct groups: the human, the heroic, and the lunatic... between the physical and the mental, the real and the illusory, the rational and the irrational, a clear line of demarcation is established.(p.95)

Such clear lines may exist in critical schemata but no such thread leads us through the labyrinth of Watt. This is an example of how twentieth-century literary criticism can be parasitic in more than an economic sense upon the creative text: reductive critical accounts actually suck them of their idiosyncratic life-blood, destroying their quiddity (or as we may more appropriately say at this juncture,

'whatness') by restating them in orthodox terms. An account like mine above, analysing the intricate dynamics of the narrative machine, is as far from the reading experience which the book offers as Professor Federman 's, because a holistic description must make Watt's narrative problems sound both more clear-edged and more gratuitously wayward and wilful than is in fact the case for the reader dealing with a page at a time.

The characterising feature of Watt is that he also can only deal with one thing at a time: each simple question demands exclusive expense of energy as he is afflicted by incapacitating doubt and exhaustion, endlessly rehearsing the alternative possibilities. Watt can hardly see in front of his own nose: weak, tired and lost, he gropes doggedly on through the alien structure of Knott's house and the book, trying to make sense of it bit by bit, trying at any rate to keep going. The thing Watt completely lacks is the confident overview which a critical account may retrospectively provide. And this is a very important point, because it is what divides this queer hero from the class of gentleman-scholars and philosophers to which his former education links him. Watt is a true underdog because he lacks the power and competence which the trained intellect normally displays in assessing and thus controlling a situation. That control is something the reader unthinkingly expects from the traditional novelist, delivering neat summaries of plot and character, following a Roman road of narrative logic from first page to last. By dramatising the struggle of a narrator as different from the norm as Watt, Beckett points out what a very artificial thing that

intellectual control is, how much of the doubt and uncertainty of everyday life it has to repress or override, how many conflicting facts it has to bludgeon into decorous accord, how much ignorance it has to cover over with fabrication. Watt, being undeviatingly honest, lacks all such tactics. Eyes bent to the puzzling inch of ground at his feet, he never gets far away enough from the individual sticking-point to gain any kind of grasp of his real (unreal) situation. He may use philosophical categories, as critics have pointed out,[25] but he is in no sense a philosopher as Murphy was, confronting normal life and deciding he could systematically reject and eliminate it in favour of the elaborate symmetries of his own mind. Watt can see nothing whole, and in this he has more truly 'come down in the world' than in his menial job and trampish appearance.

Despite his specialised engulfment in the deep pits of literary language, he is outlawed from any privileged intellectual caste by his poor and piecemeal comprehension: his one certainty is that he is lost, and in this he is representative of all ordinary people trying to make sense of an increasingly complex and cosmopolitan world whose rituals and procedures are controlled from afar. As the social machine has grown larger, so the individual has shrunk into puzzlement and a sense of his own powerlessness: as individuals have travelled farther, so the systems they find have grown more foreign to them. Global wars are only one of the ways in which the sheer size of human organisation in this century has made it possible for unfamiliar and incomprehensible forces to sweep the small man from his safe known path. Watt was written during

World War II and while Beckett was literally at the mercy of obscure events, isolated from news in the no-man's land of his hiding-place at Rousillon: nevertheless as Hugh Kenner remarks after drawing attention to the biographical circumstances of the book, 'Watt's is not an Occupation story'.[26] But it is very much a story of the century of the Occupation: it is truly modern and universal in a way that the earlier novels were not. In Watt Beckett creates a portrait of the artist which is also that of any solitary thinker out of his depth and far from home, keeping going by keeping his hand gripped obsessively hard to the stair rail and his gaze hard down on the tread of the stair in front. My first chapter suggested that selfconsciousness began when the self moved out of its native and 'natural' locale, and Beckett appears to link the crisis of the selfconscious narrator to the same phenomenon. He shows how the stress and the solitude of selfconsciousness become all but unbearable when the whole world is like Watt's, foreign and fluid, and he shows how Watt compensates by trying to make each tiny insoluble problem a familiar home.

Thus the design of the book, and the deliberate obscuring of that design, is not just ingenuity run amok, it is a metaphor for the manifold snares that are set around the simplest act of description or explanation for the critically selfconscious author in a difficult century. Watt is the first of Beckett's novels which shows the full originality and subversiveness of his artistic purpose: to fashion narrative out of the foundering of narrative. By implication such a work strips the gloss from the surface of those more certain and accomplished narratives which assume 'that

expression is achievement - must be an achievement', and demonstrates the helplessness of the ordering intellect if it once starts to register the true difficulties in perception. In Beckett's account the educated and speculative mind is actually worse off, for it may sometimes commit the ultimate mistake of dismissing the teeming proliferation of surface meanings and look for symbolic meaning, instead -

> This fragility of outer meaning had a bad effect on Watt, for it caused him to seek for another, for some meaning of what had passed, in the image of how it had passed.(p.70)

Better just to register 'what', and never ask 'why', since that imputes purpose and meaning to a world which in this novel is deliberately portrayed as random and meaningless. The search for meaning, as the famously crisp last words of the 'ADDENDA' suggest, can only lead Watt and the too-ambitious reader in his tracks into worse nonsense, for 'no symbols where none intended' (p.255). The book sets out to display a lively variety of narrative tactics but systematically deflates our hopes that any one of them will help us understand the story, so that we are left with a succession of possible paradigms and a sense there is nothing inside them, Watt's 'incidents... of great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport' (p.71).

In all this it may be seen as a staging-post in Beckett's work, the first novel which really conveys the message of my introductory quotation, that expression can strive to dramatise failure as well as achievement. It is also the first of Beckett's books to violate realism so radically as to declare the realistic axis irrelevant to its dark revolutions, centring instead upon the

impotence and ignorance of the imagination struggling to create. More Pricks than Kicks and Murphy by contrast merely indulged in a little whimsy, irony and black humour at realism's expense, giving a deliberately artificial account of caricatural human beings but still making extensive use of the solid globe for dramatic purposes. Watt the book is as uninterested in contemporary material reality as Watt its hero is in material wealth, with four and fourpence in his pocket that he has not spent for seven years. Watt doesn't believe in material reality: he cannot, it eludes him. This is an unremittingly selfconscious work in that the reality to which Watt refers us is that of its own construction and presentation, - the difficulties which the text and its readers must negotiate, - and this plane bears only elliptical relationships to any recognisable world outside the literary work. The tactics by which Beckett constantly reminds us of the insubstantiality of the matter narrated, the contrasting reality of the narrative method and resulting art-work, include such features as footnotes, lacunae, question-marks and the collection of additional material in note form at the end of the book thoughtfully labelled 'ADDENDA', all of which announce the literary - and problematic - nature of Watt. More, these tactics all tend to alert the reader to an important innovation in Watt: the problems are addressed to the reader himself, the fatigue of the narrator is intended to be shared by his audience.

The core of selfconscious and self-critical writing is hard and unrewarding labour for author and reader, as the sting in the tail of the facetious footnote to 'ADDENDA' warns us: 'The following

precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation.'(p.247) Literary production is not easy mimesis of reality, it is the far more stressful business of creating material out of the void: Watt insists it is very hard work, and Beckett demands that his reader share the work, the disbelief and the weariness. His narrator is tired: he abandons the search and turns it over to the reader by leaving a question-mark. Shall we bother to fill the gap, and are we able to with any certainty any way? Hugh Kenner remarks that whereas we looked at Murphy from the outside, 'in this book... the reader tends to find that he is becoming Watt' [27] The request for reader participation is a central feature of the practice of the selfconscious artist, as we have seen, but Beckett throws the whole nature of the contract into doubt, for he does not pamper or even seduce the reader. Woolf asserted the importance of the audience in Between the Acts: yet she still wanted them to be delighted, stimulated, entertained. Nabokov likewise invokes the reader directly in Ada, but not to send him away empty-handed. Beckett is a less indulgent author, offering in Watt more enigmas and blind ends than images. By deliberately witholding the luxury of illusion, the comfortable convention whereby the art-work pretends it is a 'slice of life', to be swallowed and simply enjoyed, the artist makes things hard for his audience. Deprived of the expected treat, they are offered instead a taxing piece of work to do. Most readers unfortunately require some compensating incentive, and that was the dilemma Beckett faced with his progressively less enticing fiction. The fact is that among the first and the most important

readers a writer will have are those who work for publishing-houses: if these readers are sufficiently alienated, the writer will find no access to others.

Murphy had been difficult to publish: finished in late spring, 1936, it did not find a publisher until December 1937 and appeared in 1938. Exacerbating with his own deliberate inaccessibility an existing situation, Beckett became perhaps the century's most famous victim of the growing disjuncture between serious literature and its audience, the lonely gap which I have described (pp.84-87) as one of the factors conditioning critical selfconsciousness. Deirdre Bair tells how during Murphy's search for a publisher

> Beckett began, first in jest, then grimly, to keep a neat, handwritten list of publishers who had rejected the novel. It grew to contain forty-two names. The intensity of his anger and hurt at its continuous rejection was such that he could barely bring himself to talk about it as late as 1974.

Even when Murphy was published, the critics were lukewarm and half of the print-run was remaindered. The experience of writing without a context of appreciation or reward may have been representative and even educative but Beckett did not for a moment enjoy it, writing to Thomas McGreevy in August 1936 'I do not feel like spending the rest of my life writing books that noone will read...', and vituperating against the publishers who rejected him. When Chatto and Windus did not take up their option on his poems after publishing More Pricks than Kicks, he promptly renamed them 'Shatupon and Windup', taking a typical scatological revenge upon the bastions of genteel success which had the cheek to reject him.[29]

Watt did even worse than the earlier work. In the end Beckett was forced to withdraw imaginatively from the hopeless and humiliating search for a publisher and concentrate on his new writing, Molloy. By the time Jerome Lindon decided he would take the Trilogy in 1950, Beckett had truly lived the problematic nature of the novel for thirteen years, since the publication of Murphy in 1937. He knew full well what commercial risks he incurred by his determinedly unorthodox methods of writing but continued all the same, as is illustrated by an exchange with an old friend who told him to write something more cheerful,

> ...which would make his fortune as well as his reputation. 'I'm not interested in stories of success,' Beckett snapped, 'only failure.'[30]

If this brought him literal failure in his career, so be it: he wan angry and hurt but he would not compromise. Finished in 1944, Watt would not be published until 1953, by which time he had found in the drama a way of reaching people which did not seem to him artistically dishonest.

Watt did not exactly convince the crowds even when published: a reviewer basically sympathetic to Beckett, Anthony Hartley in the Spectator, spoke for many when he described the book as 'hard reading...the least successful of Mr. Beckett's novels'.[31] A. Alvarez is blunter and more irritated: he speaks of Beckett's 'perverse self-destructiveness', and concludes roundly that 'the book is genuinely unreadable and, as it proved, unpublishable'.[32] It is always unwise of the critic, of course, to phrase statements about his own tastes and capacities in absolute terms, and while Alvarez may well have found that he could not read the book it is certainly

not 'unreadable' as long as it has a few ardent devotees like the present author. All the same, that does not resolve the issue. It is all very well for the author of Watt to broaden his portrait of the artist by seeking to dramatise a puzzlement more typical of the lay narrator, but the attempt remains in ironic parenthesis if the text will not attract the lay reader in through the initial turnstile. The same problem recurs in an even more acute form in the last part of Beckett's Trilogy and would not be solved until he moved away from the prison of the page and into the theatre, where he could make sure the audience was present before he in effect asked them to work with him.[33] Before he took this step however he had another just as radical to make, namely his change of language: having done so he would then write in the Trilogy a great three-part finale to his attack on the conventions of fiction.

Much has been written about Beckett's change of language, notably by John Fletcher[34] and Hugh Kenner. Kenner's remarks relate the change directly to selfconsciousness:

> To write in a language one has learned in classrooms is to be committed to vigilance, deliberation: to be aware of grammar, of syntax, above all of idiom...[35]

By starting to write in French at the midpoint of his career Beckett was giving up the language he used with such a wealth of flourish in his first two books, and adopting a language at which he would be forced to work, to make conscious choices and to be hyperaware of the difficulty of naming things, just like Watt -

> it was in vain that Watt said Pot, pot...For it was not a pot, the more he looked ... it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say Pot, pot, and be comforted. (p.78)

Whatever the element of chance in his first decision to write in

French,[36] his pursuance of that course suggests that having once decided that the verbal virtuosity of a Belacqua or a Murphy was not only irrelevant but positively destructive to his work, he backed that artistic decision with his life. Giving up English, giving up Ireland, he was giving up a traditional literary culture, the word-loving culture of Yeats and Joyce (the latter forsook his native shores but not the rich mulch of his native language). He was making the decision to look at words in a different way - for literal mimicry of colloquial speech rhythms, or else as delicate building bricks to be deployed sparingly in the construction of the minimal buildings of his choice. Words seemed dangerous to Watt because he was not quite sure how to use them: but the effect of our pursuit of Watt's 'dim mind wayfaring through barren lands' (p.250) is an enhanced sense of the power and the mystery of words, a renewed awareness that words are an autonomous web which we try to stretch over the world, not a sheet of glass through which we look at it. The selfconscious author portrays himself constantly working on the web. From the modernist writer's point of view, the real danger in words is that of using them too easily: the spontaneity of the Romantics had become suspect. For the early Beckett, the words of his native tongue had a momentum of their own, dancing and clustering together in a mode of whimsy, poetry, lyrical side-track, castellated fantasy, the kind of mode that an Irish writer like Flann O'Brien explored happily all his life. In rejecting those pleasures for the hard work of a language not naturally his, Beckett followed a single-minded course towards total control over his early and excessive verbal talent.

The first work Beckett wrote in French (between 1945 and 1946) was a sequence of four novellas which were not published as a single work, Four Novellas, until 1977: three were published in 1955 together with Texts for Nothing, and one, First Love, Beckett suppressed until 1970.[37] The novel which he wrote in 1946, Mercier and Camier, was suppressed until the same year. John Fletcher treats these as very interesting apprentice pieces, though Beckett did as it turns out subsequently salvage and publish the novel his critic describes as a 'jettisoned manuscript'.[38] Even if Beckett was serving a linguistic apprenticeship, from a literary point of view all this prose fits into a mature pattern of development. Mercier and Camier looks back to Watt with its accident-prone dreaming logic, sadistic humour and self-advertising literary nature (after every two chapters we find a laconic two-page summary of the action, just as in Watt we found the 'ADDENDA': and the narrator is complaining 'What stink of artifice' in only the fourth paragraph of the book.[39]) The Four Novellas, on the other hand, each of which centres around a derelict and aged exile who has been rejected by his family and in turn rejects human society in favour of rats and stones, look forward to the Trilogy in their sustained existence within one beleaguered human consciousness, their use of the first person, and their longing for silence and peace, peace especially from the penance of self-awareness:

> this old body which never...wished for anything, in its tarnished universe, except for the mirrors to shatter, the plane, the curved, the magnifying, the minifying, and to vanish in the havoc of its images.[40]

Beckett's next work, the Trilogy, is just such a hall of distorting mirrors in the process of shattering. The creative self which it

reflects is lonely and tortured: by contrast, the image of unity-in-diversity reflected back from Woolf's similarly selfconscious range of mirrors at the end of Between the Acts seems to belong not just to a different literary generation and country, but to a different century.

Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable represent the peak and more or less the end of Beckett's prose fiction (How It Is (1961) is properly an extended prose poem, and the shorter pieces create a genre of their own.) The three parts of the Trilogy are particularly interesting from the point of view of Beckett's development as a selfconscious artist. On the one hand they show the furthest extension of the ascetic course of action we have traced, on the other they chronologically enfold Beckett's departure into a quite different sphere, the theatre. The period in which they were written was one of intense creativity dubbed by him and subsequently by his critics 'the siege in the room'.[41] Molloy, a dramatisation of the way narrative founders, was written in 1947. After Molloy, he wrote a never performed or published play, Eleutheria. Then he returned to the second volume of the Trilogy, Malone Dies (1947-1948). As soon as he finished Malone Dies he wrote the play that was to mark the beginning of his global fame and reputation, Waiting for Godot, between October 1948 and January 1949.[42] The last part of the Trilogy, The Unnamable, the most desperate in its evocation of the solitary voice crying in the wilderness, finished the alternate novel-play-novel sequence in 1949.[43] The title of the final product of this five-year burst of achievement, Texts for Nothing, short prose pieces written in 1950 before any of the other

works had been published or performed, serves in the short term as an ironic comment on the apparent futility of Beckett's effort, writing 'for nothing', as it seemed at the time, - but still producing texts with something little short of heroism. The success of Waiting for Godot would ultimately people that void with interested faces, but Beckett had no way of predicting that. The moral which may be drawn from his long stint of solitary creative achievement 'in the room' is that the twentieth-century artist may have to be prepared to go on producing art even in the apparent absence of an audience, with no motive but his own drive towards form. The 'self' in 'selfconsciousness' may in the last resort be essential simply as some kind of audience, in the absence of any other. Such a desperate situation would have been all but incomprehensible to the aesthetic of Woolf. Subjecting her art to the imperative that she should be 'the slave of my audience', it could not have occurred to her that later in the century this would seem not so much self-abnegation as enviable self-confidence, since the determination to serve implies a certainty that an audience for serious writing is there.

The Trilogy is about the compulsion to write in the void. I noted already in Watt a preoccupation with the mechanics of narration eating away our confidence in the matter narrated. This time however there is not even a hypothetical Mr. Knott to act as a central alternative source of curiosity for the reader: there are characters, of a kind, but most of them are mere provisional pegs around which the game of narration is played, or rather a series

of masks which come to life when we see behind them the figure of the writer. Molloy and Malone, both rudely believable, are exceptions: but they are writers, and their identification with their author is closer and more constant: thus, in a sense, the more we believe in them, the more we realise they are actually authorial ciphers. The decrepitude and poverty of the men of the Trilogy is colourful, but we have seen it before. It is the necessary climate for the workings of the authorial imagination (and a metaphorical reflection of his literal lack of worldly success) rather than any kind of attempt at local colour or narrative interest as such. The narrative matter of the Trilogy, in fact, consists simply of the drama of the text's creation, the drama of the voice or voices which are struggling to put images, sentences, words together, or in the end just trying to shut out the howls of pain which cut across lucid speech. In Watt the narrating voice found language problematical: but here the relationship has deteriorated much further and the central motif of the Trilogy is the author's battle with speech, a battle he is driven to engage against his own wishes, the words and stories achieving their own fiendish momentum even as he seeks to undermine and destroy them, himself clinging on in the dim hope that he will finally be allowed to stop speaking. But the last volume ends with a despairing knowledge that he has not yet won the right to peace, together with a kind of hope that if speech must go on the ability to tell stories may return:

> you must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me...perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens, on my story, that would surprise me,

> if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. (p.418)

The Trilogy charts within its microcosm a disintegration of conventional literary expectations as dramatic as that I have traced through all the preceding work. Even more disturbing is its panting, obsessed final terminus, the three-and-a-half-page sentence whose last gasp is quoted above. The first volume, Molloy, comes nearest to telling a conventional story (though as with Watt, summary makes it sound infinitely more linear and assimilable than it in fact is.) From the first paragraph we realise we have a literal portrait of the artist, in the first person. Molloy is writing his story, in a room which once belonged to his mother: he doesn't know how he got there, but he does know that a man comes every week and 'gives me money and takes away the pages' (p.7). (Beckett may well have wished that publishing in real life was as easy, writing his own pages with no publisher in sight.) The story Molloy has to tell is that of a journey he once undertook, despite his extreme physical decrepitude, in search of a mother to whom he relates at a level of cheerful sadism and financial greed. After many absurd deflections and misadventures and an ever more difficult and laborious passage through woods he finally comes to rest in a ditch. The narrative does exactly the same thing, becoming, bogged down in a sea of self-doubt as Molloy attempts to describe honestly his state of mind, and fails because language itself fails him. The dragging weight of his physical frame is an exact metaphor of his mental exhaustion, the halts in his physical progress

correspond to the halting effort of thought -

> ...when I say I said, etc. all I mean is that I knew confusedly things were so, without knowing exactly what it was all about. And every time I say, I said this, or, I said that, or speak of a voice saying, far away inside me, Molloy, and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple, or find myself compelled to attribute to others intelligible words, or hear my own voice uttering to others more or less articulate sounds, I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. For what really happened was quite different...Yet a little while, at the rate things are going, and I won't be able to move, but will have to stay, where I happen to be, unless some kind person comes and carries me. For my marches got shorter and shorter and my halts in consequence more and more frequent and I may add prolonged...(pp. 87-88)

The perplexed story-teller in his room and the crawling derelict in the wood elide in the figure who finally comes to rest in a ditch at the end of the first part of Molloy. But a voice is heard saying 'that help was coming. Literally.' (p.91) And indeed help literally comes to the guttering narrative, which passes with part II into the crisp short paragraphs of the investigative agent Moran, who is sent in search of Molloy by forces as mysterious as those which compel Molloy to write. This is at first a portrait of quite a different artist, authoritative and traditional, even authoritarian. But he never finds Molloy: instead the narrative shows him becoming more and more like Molloy in the course of his own unhappy odyssey as his physical fitness deserts him, together with his son, his bicycle and his high standards of cleanliness, efficiency and self-confidence. He ends up alone and on his knees, much like Molloy, and his paragraphs sag and sprawl. He is laconically recalled by a messenger, and is last seen bleakly revolving the lie at the heart of the neat literary formula with which

he had so confidently begun his part of the narrative:

> Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining. (p.176)

It makes a good start to a story thus boldly to evoke a dramatic hour and bravura weather: but life is less shaped and stylised than art. The implication of Moran's final revoking of his false beginning is that traditional literary language is too simple and too certain for the bewildering complexity of the world. After his brush with chaos and despair, Moran can no longer employ the old formulae.

The pitfalls in narrating adventures are shown to be every bit as great as the pitfalls in <u>having</u> adventures. The former are therefore economically demonstrated through the charting of the second. Molloy the narrator and Molloy the adventurer end up in a ditch, but once chaos is abroad it is not so easily got rid of. Molloy's chaotic logic rises up through every snag and tear in the initially orderly phenomenal world to overwhelm Moran's precise self-importance, and overthrows all conventional aesthetics or philosophy with its perverse laws,

> the laws of...my mind, that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and that you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. (p.13)

In fact, however, only the clearcut text that Moran in his early official capacity created is obliterated, the text compounded of fictional bromides like rain beating on the windows and metaphorical midnights. A much more exciting text, with Molloy and Moran as two lines

inexorably converging on chaos, invokes the possibility of a new and unorthodox sort of symmetry. Something of real formal beauty is being constructed underneath all the mud and rubble. This seems to be the real meaning of the reply Moran gets, when he tries to discover from the messenger Gaber something at least about the higher purposes behind his mission and recall. In the context of the human wreck to whom it is put Gaber's answer sounds merely derisive: 'life is a thing of beauty...and a joy for ever' (p.165). Moran's incredulity, reflecting the reader's, is wittily expressed: 'Do you think he meant human life?' he asks, encapsulating the real desolation at the heart of Beckett's portrayal of human affairs. But if we refer back to the original context of the aphorism,[45] the first line of Keats' Endymion where the poet discourses upon the enduring value of beautiful form and especially its incarnation in story,[46] it has a more than derisive application to the events of Molloy, for the work indeed constitutes a 'thing of beauty' in the structural discipline and formal elegance with which it links mental and physical event, style and incident, Molloy and Moran. It is not the kind of beauty we are used to, but digging beneath the difficulties we find the beauty of formal innovation and surprise. The 'life' of Molloy which is a 'thing of beauty' is not human life as we know it, it is the shaped life of a single art-work. It is perhaps to the creation of this life that Moran refers quite early on in his report, when he is describing his attitude to the mysterious task he has been set:

> what I was doing I was doing neither for Molloy, who mattered nothing to me, nor for myself, of whom I despaired, but on behalf of a cause which, while having need of us to be accomplished, was in its essence anonymous, and would subsist, haunting the minds of

men, when its miserable artisans should be no more. (p.115)

The link with the messenger's notion of 'a thing of beauty...and a joy for ever' seems fairly close. The characters of Molloy are so much creatures of the author that they are overtly conscripted to help in the execution of his plan, the 'cause...having need of us to be accomplished'. We are reminded of the very different but equally steely structure of Nabokov's King Queen Knave, and the sense Martha and Franz have of being 'securely bound by the invisible, inexorable lines of that figure.'[47] The structural plan of Molloy is laid bare much more brutally: characters and readers alike are thereby invited to join in the effortful creation of the final design. A thing of beauty, even if the beauty is as unfamiliar to us as Celia's 'difficult music heard for the first time', can be a joy forever and forever 'haunt ... the minds of men'. The statement of belief in beauty (of whatever kind) is something new to Beckett, and the force of Moran's suggestion that it is worth creating something to outlive the farcical span of our life on earth is increased rather than emperilled by the savagely unromantic ribaldry with which Beckett portrays the mortal part of his artisans, farting, masturbating, falling over, in all things doomed to fall.

Malone Dies, the second volume of the Trilogy, repeats the theme of writing against chaos: also, of leaving written records to survive death. It portrays a man who is driven by a compulsion to create an account of himself and a small corpus of stories which will remain when, as Moran puts it, 'its miserable artisan...should be no more.' Which threatens to be soon, for he is dying. The book has only one hero, an old man alone in his room with pencil

and paper trying to complete his fixed narrative programme before the end comes. Darkness washes up around him. In the event his own end and the end of the book synchronise with the end of the story which he has managed to wrest at such awful cost from physical weakness, a panicky shortage of time, the elusiveness of his writing implements, loss of faith in the act of narration and, as so often, despair about language itself.

Malone's narrative difficulties (which are also the author's and the reader's) are threefold. First, he is an exaggerated version of Watt in terms of his uncertainty about his material, the anti-thesis of the nineteenth-century omniscient narrator, a puzzled fellow-traveller rather than a guide for the reader on the literary journey. 'What was that I said?' he asks, and answers 'It does not matter.' (p.180) What he <u>does</u> know intimately is the dim, chaotic country where Watt, Molloy and finally Moran lost themselves: he is an afficionado of 'shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding' (p.181). And he is quite certain about his status as ignorant narrator, apologetic to the reader but unsurprised that it is so: "Unfortunately I do not know quite what floor I am on...'(p.219). Secondly, Malone undermines any narrative effect as soon as it is achieved, or else breaks off in contempt before he quite achieves it: 'Sapo loved nature, took an interest. This is awful.' (p.191) It is either awful or else dishonest, and in either case he abandons the attempt as soon as he notices: 'I have just written, I fear I must have fallen, etc. I hope this is not too great a distortion of the truth.' (p.209) The worst kind of dishonesty is pretentiousness: after a little speculation about the nature of his own existence,

we are rudely cut off with a reminder to himself not to launch out upon 'all this ballsaching poppycock about life and death' (p.225). Beckett could never trust himself enough, or respect the human intellect enough, to launch on the kind of metaphysical and moral speculations which Nabokov and Woolf assume as their home ground. Thirdly Malone of course suffers from the pervasive distrust of language we have already diagnosed. Thus he is perpetually stopped in his tracks by the power of clichés to exaggerate:- 'Big Lambert was highly thought of as a bleeder and disjointer of pigs and greatly sought after, I exaggerate, in that capacity.' (p.200) 'A great calm stole over him. Great calm is an exaggeration.' (p.212) Even his names don't work, suddenly ring false, so that his creature Sapo has to turn into Macmann in mid-sentence - 'For Sapo - no, I can't call him that any more...' (p.229)

Nevertheless, somehow or other, despite the severity with which the dying man watches himself for glibness or pretence, lucid images do emerge from the darkness and imprint their images upon it all the more vividly. It is as if part of his mind, the censor and the doubter, sleeps, and there is a brief interlude for fantastic dreams to slip through. Two of Beckett's best female grotesques, Lady Pedal, benefactress of the Saint John of God's asylum, and Moll, chambermaid and nonpareil sex object in the same institution, play unforgettable cameo roles in the book's dream-life. They are not pretty but they certainly have style, as does the language which is suddenly released and allowed to describe them. Moll is

> ....a little old woman, immoderately ill-favoured of

> both face and body...the thin yellow arms contorted by some kind of bone deformation, the lips so broad that they seemed to devour half the face, were at first sight her most revolting features. She wore by way of ear-rings two long ivory crucifixes which swayed wildly at the least movement of her head.
> I pause to record that I feel in extraordinary form. Delirium perhaps. (p.258)

The image achieved, the selfconscious narrator steps forward again to congratulate himself on his effect and also to remind his readers that Moll is merely part of one of his stories, which he is just for the moment telling rather well. But Moll in fact continues to develop, culminating in the revelation of her chief sexual attraction, which is a stroke of fictional genius, to wit a crucifix carved out of her sole remaining tooth -

> ...parting her jaws and pulling down her blobber-lip she discovered, breaking with its solitary fang the monotony of the gums, a long yellow canine bared to the roots and cared, with the drill probably, to represent the celebrated sacrifice... She let go her lip, which sprang back into place with a smack. This incident made a deep impression on Macmann and Moll rose with a bound in his affections. (p.265)

It also makes a deep impression on the reader. The dreadful dry friction of the affair between Moll and Macmann (glimpsed 'trying to bundle his sex into his partner's like a pillow into a pillow-slip' (p.261)) weighs heavy in the scales when we are trying to assess the balance between narrative and anti-narrative, invention and despair with invention's deceit. Lady Pedal also flings her own poundage into the narrative side of the scales, and it is not a negligible poundage:

> Lady Pedal clung to the box, her bust flung back. She was a huge, big, tall, fat woman. Artificial daisies with brilliant yellow disks gushed from her broad-brimmed straw hat. (p.286)

This time there is no separate wry intervention from a selfconscious authorial voice commenting on his own virtuosity, but there is a kind

of commentary built into the descriptive language itself. By the unceremonious piling up of adjectives Beckett humorously informs us that he is pulling out all the stops now, throwing in everything he can think of to add to the size of his creation. In so doing, moreover, he is deliberately violating accepted literary usage, which would insist that 'huge' as the most extreme of the adjectives kills all the others. This might be true for a less designing author than Beckett: but when we consider a more orthodox alternative arrangement - perhaps 'Lady Pedal was a big woman, both tall and fat, indeed she could only be described as huge' - we see how much is missing. In Beckett's version the 'huge' serves as a flat platter on which the rest of the adjectives are slammed violently down, catching Lady Pedal's own taste for violent excess and also pointing unequivocally to the fact that the narrator is in alarmingly good spirits and dancing on the pedals for all he is worth. The verb 'gushed' has the same kind of dual reference: first it is a perfectly good literal verb for the movement of a wave of flowers, giving an unusually vivid image: secondly it is a pre-emptive strike against the reader who might be thinking, 'aha, there's literature for you, now he's enjoying a nice bit of description just like a less proud author would.' In fact the flowers 'gush' partly because this kind of prose habitually gushes: and the flowers are 'artificial' because this sort of description habitually is. The wonderful thing is that, as was the case with Moll, the physical sense of Lady Pedal's existence remains four-square afloat, despite the sardonic undertow of authorial distancing comment, thanks to the freshness and vigour of the surface wave. But Moll and Lady Pedal are grotesques. What finally gives Malone Dies a far stronger hold

on the imagination than Molloy or The Unnamable, and makes it for all of its difficulty something of an oasis in the Trilogy, is the central presence of Malone, who is a great deal more than a one-dimensional grotesque.

We know almost nothing of his history, and nothing of his motivation for writing his testament except that he must do it before he dies. All we know is his present poverty, his little heap of possessions, his dependence upon outside help (which seems to have vanished) for food, his creaking bedstead. But much more important are the things which relate directly to the act of writing: his stubby pencil, slowly wearing down, and his certainty that he is dying. We are in effect locked in with a dying man and most important a dying writer in the circumscribed space of his room, and without actually being told very much about him we learn a great deal through our intimate involvement with each minute movement of his thought, each surge of energy, each fresh doubt. Malone engages our sympathies as a character in a way that Molloy and Moran could not. He has courage, he has a sense of humour, and he has a single-minded mission which is all the drama that the book needs to carry it forward, once the initial premise is accepted that a book about writing stories can itself be an adventure story. Moreover, despite the scepticism with which he views his 'need for prettiness', he reveals more frequently the intensely lyrical eye and ear for language which made occasional brighter spots in the dark woods of Molloy: 'I did not despair of seeing the light tremble, some day, through the still boughs, the strange light of the plain, its pale wild eddies, through the bronze-still boughs, which no

breath ever stirred.' (Molloy, p.85) Whenever the poet in Malone is allowed his head, the language suddenly achieves a soaring balance and ease -

> ...he loved the flight of the hawk and could distinguish it from all others. He would stand rapt, gazing at the long pernings, the quivering poise, the wings lifted from the plummet drop, the wild reascent, fascinated by such extremes of need, of pride, of patience and solitude.(p.191)

The overt subject of this description is Malone's invented character Sapo: but in face we are being told something about an enduring quality of Malone's and behind him Beckett's powers of discernment. The clear evidence of the text is that it is not only Sapo but the hand and eye which animate Sapo that can distinguish the flight of the hawk from all others, for the movement of the second sentence delicately proceeds to do just that. Such rare flights transport us suddenly far from the close focus on Molloy's or Malone's immediate struggle to narrate. The sharp contrast reminds us what a deliberately claustral literary world Beckett offers us in the Trilogy. Conventional novels offer us an unfamiliar fictional world in the guise of a colourfully foreign reality, unshadowed by the presence of the narrator. Selfconscious novels like Nabokov's or Vonnegut's offer us a fictional world which confesses it is fictional, unveils the fictionist, and yet preserves the intrinsic colour and foreignness of the matter narrated. In the Trilogy, the matter narrated has ceased to be realiably distinct, reliably distant in space or time from the primary, punishing reality of the author at work. We are for the most part imprisoned with Beckett, sharing in 'the siege in the room'. This is what Ludovic Janvier means when in the diagrammatic analysis of Beckett's works which precedes his article, 'Place of Narration/Narration of Place', he distinguishes

the 'Place where story is told' in the Trilogy and Texts for Nothing as 'intratextual' as opposed to the 'extratextual' norm, and later expands on this to say that 'The text declares itself the only reality and the only conceivable space'.[48] Despite the clarity and force of this it is not, however, quite that simple, because the narrative voice as we have seen makes sudden impassioned gestures towards escape from its own echoes. A passage like the following reminds us that Beckett's creative imagination was not really born and bred within the stark enclosures of the black and white page, and hints that it will not be content always to remain there:

> ...my fingers...write in other latitudes and the air that breathes through my pages and turns them without my knowing...is not the air of this second-last abode, and a mercy it is. And perhaps on my hands it is the shimmer of the shadow of leaves and flowers and the brightness of a forgotten sun. (p.235)

The key of such lyrical passages is usually minor. Malone or his creature focusses upon past memories or dreams of a larger, brighter world with all the intensity of loss, and sometimes with the violence also of something released after long repression. Refusing any details of a personal past, declaring indeed that he knows nothing about it, Malone is haunted by a recurring memory of coloured lights from his childhood. Despite in effect taking Beckett's own dislike of personal publicity to the point where he is entirely ignorant himself about his history and wonders whether he was ever even born,

> ...it sometimes seems to me I did get born and had a long life...and wandered in the towns, the woods and wildernesses and tarried by the seas in tears before the islands and peninsulas where night lit the little brief yellow lights of man and all night the great white and

> coloured beams shining in the caves where I was happy,
> crouched on the sand in the lee of the rocks with the
> smell of the seaweed and the wet rock and the howling
> of the wind the waves whipping me with foam or
> sighing on the beach softly clawing the shingle...(p.226)

The lyrical note literally bursts through and almost drowns us with its momentum, the storm of its release from the memory-store of Malone who insists he is not Malone and has no memory. In such carefully guarded neutrality 'Throes are the only trouble' (p.180). For the reader the throes of erupting visual poetry characterise Malone as a poet and a visionary, albeit a poet who lives in fear of 'prettiness' (ibid.) and equally of the turbulence of rougher visions which threaten to drown and dwarf his other fictional puppets such as 'Macmann pigmy [who] beneath the great black gesticulating pines gazes at the distant raging sea.' (p.275)

This is really the portrait of an artist suffering from a kind of cultural schizophrenia which seems essentially Beckett's own condition, developing as he had from a hyper-literate, flamboyantly verbal and conventionally successful young man into a middle-aged writer who viewed literature, language and success with horror and disgust - alloyed with longing, for he could not leave literature alone. Malone's feeling for natural beauty and the lyrical cadences of language struggle to assert themselves in the face of his suspicion of conventional poetic sentiment and linguistic prettiness. The struggle is not so much described as enacted, with sympathy and humour and a direct request for the reader's involvement with Malone both as a schizoid poet and as a dying man writing against death. The dual nature of this appeal is important: though the reader of Watt was enfolded (if not involved)

in Watt's mental dilemmas, Watt as a narrator had some charm but no passion or substance, no believable life outside the coils of impossible thought. In Malone Dies Beckett has widened his focus on the artist. Instead of the myopic obsession with the difficulties of narrative discourse which was the centre of his artist-portraiture in Watt and Molloy, he moves away and looks at the storyteller as a totality. Outside the thin flat enclaves of his pages, after all, the fact is that storytellers are men and not dissolvable figments of a higher literary imagination. Why do men write, why do they try to make monuments to life in the face of death? Beckett shows how Malone fights to record the living reality of his consciousness in the knowledge that it will soon be snuffed out. In the end, this blunter imperative, 'Write before you die', beats down the paralysing (and faintly luxurious) ramifications of self-doubt. Malone's case (in this as so much else) is perhaps not so very different from Beckett's, who said, according to Deirdre Bair, that in the end he continued to write because he 'could not have gone through the awful wretched mess of life without having left a stain upon the silence'.[49] Malone's may be a minimal commitment, in terms of lacking excess philosophical baggage, but it is an absolute commitment all the same and it demands the reader's. As the book's close approaches the reader is therefore not only longing for the formal puzzle to be resolved, for Malone's initial plan to be completed: he is also, as he might be in a much more traditional novel, rooting for Malone.

Malone does finish his story, driving himself with the repeated exhortation 'On' over the last pages, and the reader rejoices in that

achievement as he does in the symmetry with which the end of Malone, the end of Macmann his fictional persona, and the end of Malone Dies are synchronised. The book ends in a cadence of fragmentary poetry, as Macmann drifts peacefully out to sea in the company of Lemuel, who has effectively bludgeoned the story to death by a little violent business with his stick, and Malone, who manipulates both puppets and drifts in their invented boat to the end of his own life. The after-images of coloured existence which remain in his and the reader's mind are beautifully symbolised as coloured lights seen from the shore which evoke in turn the vivid memories of Malone's boyhood:

> ....They are far out in the bay. Lemuel has shipped his oars, the oars trail in the water. The night is strewn with absurd
> absurd lights, the stars, the beacons, the buoys, the lights of earth and in the hills the faint fires of the blazing gorse. Macmann, my last, my possessions, I remember, he is there too, perhaps he sleeps. Lemuel
> Lemuel is in charge, he raises the hatchet on which the blood will never dry, but not to hit anyone, he will not hit anyone, he will not hit anyone any more, he will not touch anyone any more, either with it or with it or with it or
> or with it or with his hammer or with his stick or with his fist or in thought in dream I mean never he will never
> or with his pencil or with his stick or
> or light light I mean
> never there he will never
> never anything
> there
> any more (p.289)

Beckett says his farewell along with his fictional author Malone and Malone's fictional creatures Macmann and Lemuel: Lemuel's hatchet or stick, his fictional capacity for violent action, swiftly dispatching the two colossal sailors and toppling the joyous bust of Lady Pedal, really only clears superfluous verbal flesh from white paper, serving Malone's (and his author, Beckett's) desire for

termination. Stick and pencil become interchangeable instruments, and Malone's pencil is being peacefully yielded from Beckett's hand. This masterly synthesis is achieved without any compromise with traditional narrative procedures: there is no rounding off of the invented characters' absurd existence, they are merely left floating in amber as the fictional form itself closes, simultaneously disengaging itself from its overt content, the little band in the boat. The originality of the formal achievement is as great as that of Molloy, and this time there is also a rare and moving lyric grace: instead of Malone's ambivalent impulses splitting the work into disparate fragments, the tension forces his narrative into a new mould which can accommodate conflicting moods and impulses and even its sporadic moves towards self-destruction. This is what Beckett meant when he told Tom Driver that art had too long 'withstood the pressure of chaotic things' because 'to admit them was to jeopardise form'. But now there must be '"...new form, and...this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else."'[50]

The trouble with too harmonious and smooth a literary form is that it tells lies about the life it pretends to reflect. At the end of Malone Dies Beckett in effect refuses to say, as a Dickens or Thackeray does in the mellow comfort of his concluding cadences, that life is either serious or symmetrical: yet art can be both of those things. This seems to be why later Beckett characters find art (in its simplest guise of story-telling) a mitigation. In this first portrait of art with a real human context,

of the artist as a suffering and enduring human creature, 'serious' in his story-telling where Belacqua was 'not serious', Beckett opens the way towards the much more benign and understanding vision of art in his plays. As a private and professionalised rigmarole for literati, art was both obsessional and disgusting, with its fake rituals of order and unnatural language. But when he can see it whole, as something universal with responds to human need and longer-term human aspiration, he does not have to destroy it in the familiar self-directed fury. Malone is finally given rest and absolution after all his ribaldry and anguish and effort, and the last note of the work is a queer but undeniable formal beauty. That sense of reconciliation would be explored further in the drama that Beckett was just beginning to write: Waiting for Godot followed directly upon Malone. Before moving decisively into the theatre however Beckett wanted to say a long farewell to the kind of narrative prose whose writing had proved an extended torment to him. In The Unnamable he releases in a tirade far more violent, desperate and unrelieved than any he had yet launched the anger and frustration he had felt in his lonely struggle with the page. At this point in his development his work more or less divided into two, with prose very much the lesser and diminishing branch in terms of bulk. As the prose texts grew shorter and sparser through the next three decades they remained the principle repository for his recurrent sense of the futility and sterility of literature, and also the site of his own highest critical esteem.[51]

The reader may wonder where next Beckett can take prose fiction, after the final achievement in Malone Dies of an accommodation

between form and formlessness in that moment of perfect becalmment, where narrative and all its troubles give up the ghost and the peace of completed structure is won. Writer and reader appear to start from very much the same sense of perplexity, for The Unnamable begins in a staccato burst of questions. It is as if the resolution of the second part of the Trilogy had never been: and here as so often Beckett vividly evokes the real condition of the artist, for however perfectly he has resolved the formal problem of each completed art-work, he starts on the next with nothing, and the whole house to build again.

> Where now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I.
> Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that.
> Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. (p.293)

So the kind of 'I' we have is in doubt, except that this is once more a creature forced to utter and invent: and language is again such a trickster that even the phrase central to the structure of the whole book, 'going on', is instantly seen to be something of an overstatement in relation to the miserable struggle it describes. It is a long way to go towards chaos in the very first sentence of a book, and indeed The Unnamable is an escalating nightmare of doubt, rejection and panic. By this time the utterer is not even human. The last volume of the Trilogy represents Beckett's strongest attack upon the easy humanism of literature in his assumption of this effectively inhuman, bodiless, and immobile persona, buried up to his neck in an urn, unable to turn his head, lacking lids to close his eyes, swallowing and spitting out again his own endless sentences, occasionally inventing rags or winding-sheets of graceless story in which he appears now as Mahood, now as Worm, rejecting all conventional frames of human morality or human feeling

and of course 'the fatal leaning towards expressiveness' (p.394), the fatally seductive human talent for articulate speech. Yet he cannot stop speaking, so that in the end he is reduced to literal howls of agony.

The horror and absurdity with which all the normal contrivances of narrative have become infected for the uttering persona are crystallised in the account of Mahood's attempts to return to his family, a lunatic parody of a Ulyssean return which makes it clear how far Beckett has come from the tutelage of the master of Ulysses. By comparison, all of Joyce's work was still securely within an affirmative literary tradition. Mahood tells us that he has been on a 'world tour' and is somewhat physically reduced by it, having 'left my leg behind in the Pacific, yes...somewhere round there' (p.319). The Ulyssean voyaging hero is thus suitably diminished in stature before the homeward progress even begins, but far worse is to come. The last lap of the journey takes him across a vast yard in the centre of which is a windowless tower from which his wife, parents and the less orthodox addition of 'eight or nine' 'little ones' born in his absence watch his progress in ever-diminishing circles towards them, unsurprised by his farcical slowness -

> What about throwing him a few scraps? No no, it might upset him. They did not want to check the impetus that was sweeping me towards them...A few more summers and he'll be in our midst.

Unfortunately the long preliminaries never quite attain their appropriate conclusion:

> ...I never reached them, that is to say they all died first, the whole ten or eleven of them, carried off by

> sausage-poisoning, in great agony. Incommoded first by their shrieks, then by the stench of decomposition, I turned sadly away. (pp. 320-321)

But that is only the first version of events. When the narrator goes back over the story he discovers certain inaccuracies: for example, he lacks an arm as well as a leg. Then he decides that his fictional protagonist Mahood, who represented him at the time but has since assumed an independent existence, defamed him when he alleged that the shrieks and the stench caused him to turn back. In fact, he insists, he staunchly pursued his crazy circular course to the end:

> So let us consider now what really occurred. Finally I found myself, without surprise, within the building, circular in form as already stated, its ground-floor consisting of a single room flush with the arena, and there completed my rounds, stamping under foot the unrecognisable remains of my family, here a face, there a stomach, as the case might be, and sinking into them with the remains of my crutches, both coming and going. To say I did so with satisfaction would be stretching the truth. For my feeling was rather one of annoyance at having to founder in such muck just at the moment when my closing contortions called for a firm and level surface. I like to fancy, even if it is not true, that it was in mother's entrails I spent the last days of my voyage...(p.326)

This is circular logic with a vengeance. Behind the image of Mahood's nightmare course is the nightmare travail of an artist dead-set on the destruction of all fictional convention, going about it the long and formal way rather than sending in an assault force of cabaret artists, as the Dadaists and Surrealists did. Traditional patterns like the Ulyssean myth cannot be simply discounted or tossed at a stroke aside by a man of Beckett's education and loving scholarship, they have to be explored at length, inverted and mocked with mordant wit. Joyce's innovations in fictional form asserted optimism about the rich possibilities of literary experiment for

pleasure and novelty. He never ceased to love the convolutions of myth, or, more simply, words and their human utterers. Beckett, on the other hand, writes in the Trilogy from a deep weariness and despair with fiction's repertoire of lies . He is commenting on it from an uncommitted limbo, angrily wielding now one literary weapon, now another, just long enough to prove them frivolous and absurd, then tossing them away. The first difficulty is that literature and 'the fatal leaning towards expressiveness' (p.394) sticks to him like lime: Malone had his lyrical 'throes' and even here in the darkness there are 'shreds of old visions' (p.409), and a voice

> speaks of gleams, it is truly at a loss, gleams,
> yes, far, or near... enough said, gleams, as at
> dawn, then dying, as at evening, or flaring up,
> they do that too, blaze up more dazzling than
> snow, for a second, that's short...these gleams...
> they were to save me, they were to devour me...(p.415)

The second difficulty is that silence, the end of the uttering voice, fills him with ambiguous fear. Antiliterature by definition cannot exist without literature. The formal habits and cultural premises of literature supplied Beckett with plenty of material for the long guerrilla campaign of which The Unnamable is the climax. Silence is of course the final antidote to literature: the absence of literary production show far more disdain for literature than ever impassioned antiliterature like Beckett's does. To mount such a savage and relentless assault is itself a clear token of desperate involvement with its object, and a refusal quite to give it up.

Fiction has traditionally offered an arena for humanist moral and philosophical debate. Yet here all the moral values which have formed the debating-ground and narrative impetus of fiction are

reduced to a mess of dismembered limbs. They bear some dreadful family relationship to our morals, but sickness and violence have rendered them bloody, putrid, almost unrecognisable, crushed underneath Beckett's inexorably trampling crutches. We are used to the novelist as some kind of moral arbiter: Beckett gives us the novelist as moral slapstick artist, his buckets full of acid, not water. Much of the acid is self-directed, flung at the narrator who slowly dissolves into helpless incoherence on the page before us, the humanised fictional shapes he is forced to adopt each in turn crumbling quickly away. All that is left is 'a great wild black and white eye...it's to weep with' (p.362), and a terrified voice on the far edge of intellectual control which must go on speaking at the instigation of his faceless pursuers, who perpetually cry

> Forward! But where is forward? And why? The dirty pack of fake maniacs, they know I don't know, they know I forget all they say as soon as they say it.(p.371)

Real incoherence, real madness seems to beset the narrating voice as it rejects so much of the controlled moral tone which is the usual equipment of fictional art that it is left trapped in a narrow register of rage, hysteria and wild humour, uncertain of how to go 'forward' at all. The essential drama of The Unnamable is fought out around the basic limiting conditions of art, those of the human intellect and imagination. These volatile regions are necessarily conditioned by all sorts of moral, social and philosophical assumptions. Beckett at this point wants to challenge the unthinking way in which literature has sometimes used these assumptions so badly that he makes a wholesale act of negation: he lops off the human heads of his characters, refuses any kind of human identity

to the narrating voice, pours derision on the literary traps of human speech and his readers' literary expectations of respectable human morals and recognisable human voices. But humanity with all its hydra heads pushes back through, and he is left raging against his own pattern-making art. He externalises this compulsion to create in the form of obscure masters who drive him on to reimpose the contamination of human shape on the pure and fragmented eye and voice with which he started-

> The rascal, he's getting humanised, he's going to lose if he doesn't watch out, if he doesn't take care, and with what would he take care, with what would he form the faintest conception of the condition they are decoying him into, with their ears, their eyes, their tears and a brainpan where anything may happen...it's they describe him thus, without knowing, thus because they need him thus, perhaps...(p.363)

'They' are an infinitely more threatening and omnipresent version of the obscure forces driving Molloy and Moran in the first volume of the Trilogy. Most obviously an objectification of the writer's compulsion to create, they also seem to represent the reader's demands of him. 'They' expect there to be humanity and narrative in this text. The strongest determination of the uttering voice is that at any rate he will show no complicity with these expectations. His proud claim is 'that he understands nothing': 'That's his strength, his only strength...'(p.363). He does not understand how to think or feel or speak in any of the accepted ways, he refuses to understand or comply with what is expected of him by literary tradition and by an audience trained on literary tradition.

The reasoning by which Beckett inverts incomprehension into an

aesthetic strength has already been brought into play in the creation of Watt, whose incapacity to assimilate and take for granted the smallest facts about the world, the most minor linguistic certainty, enables him to evoke a hauntingly strange imaginative universe of his own. The truly ignorant narrator should be perfectly equipped to achieve Shklovsky's 'defamiliarisation',[52] to experience everything afresh and thus present a refreshed world view to the reader. Incapable of using the most readily accessible terminology for describing his world, he has to find another. Watt, Molloy, Moran and Malone were all defiantly 'ignorant' narrators: but the Unnamable takes the process one step beyond refusing to know. The uttering voice in this third volume of the Trilogy also refuses to be known and therefore understood by the reader: Beckett prevents his readers from understanding too easily, as well as his characters. This latest protagonist is unnamable and unknowable in that he refuses the facility of identification, refuses to accept the lie of a fictitious name, refuses the whole business of fictional characterisation. The invention of characters seems to him just a way of dressing up and falsifying the real business of fiction, which is simply to talk about oneself, under the literary decoration:- 'I invented love, music, the smell of flowering currant, to escape from me.' (p.307) When the truth bursts out it is brutally plain, and selfconsciousness becomes a kind of violent, abortive series of rushes at the walls of the cul-de-sac of self -

> It's I who am doing this to me, I who am talking to me about me...there was never anyone, anyone but me, anything but me, talking to me of me, impossible to stop, impossible to go on, but I must go on, I'll go on, without anyone, without anything, but me, but my voice...(p.398)

The theme of the story-teller's unwillingness to name himself coexisting with a generally repressed desire to reveal himself is a recurrent theme in Beckett's work, culminating as we shall see in one of the last plays, the indicatively-titled Not I (1973). Deirdre Bair has traced this same ambivalent process of self-portraiture and careful disguise in Beckett's own artistic career.[53] Through characterisation the self is rendered less vulnerable and less elusive, more entertaining, comprehensible, clearly-defined: nevertheless, it is a dishonest process, Beckett at this stage feels, and a flight from real self-revelation. In developing his case, the persona of The Unnamable is frequently given authority to pass Beckett's past fiction under review, thus underlining the fictionality of characters who even in the world of their own books were depicted as artificial. And he declares he wants nothing to do with even such self-dissolving artifices, determining to boot the old inventions wholesale out of the creative consciousness:-

> First I'll say what I'm not...then what I am, it's already under way, I have only to resume at the point where I let myself be cowed, I am neither, I needn't say, Murphy, nor Watt, nor Mercier, nor - no, I can't even bring myself to name them, nor any of the others whose very names I forget, who told me I was they, who I must have tried to be, under duress, or through fear, or to avoid acknowledging me...(p.328)

A truthful act of self-identification can only be by negatives: 'First I'll say what I'm not...' Thus the speaking voice in The Unnamable not only concentrates on the amount he does not know about the world, he also wilfully insists on the things we do not know about him. In creating a traditional 'character', more conventional artists offer for our understanding a fictional human being who has

already been named and analysed. Here we are offered an uttering voice who says only that he is himself, and will not be fictionalised: nor can that self be easily understood.

Having refused the mask of created character, he takes the logical next step of refusing membership of the human fraternity at all. This he has already in a sense done through his display of conventionally 'inhuman' sentiments in the Mahood saga, as we have seen, and through the physical unreality of his incarnation, an egg-like monstrosity imprisoned in his urn. The most important danger in what he calls 'getting humanised', though, is intellectual: it lies precisely in this shared conspiracy among men to understand each other through automatic stereotypes which a witty or weeping egg cannot help but thwart. Art like other civilised treaties between men requests that we 'know what it means', and the request for understanding is dangerous in its very certainty of being accepted: the traditional artist wants his audience to collude in an implicit mass of assumptions, whereas an artist liké Beckett fires volleys of angry questions. Over the centuries of broadly humanist artistic production where 'expression is achievement', and the achievement usually rebounds to the glory of the human race, we have grown so used to the reassuring premises of art and its dependably decorative procedures that we do too often know what it means and what we expect of it. Too often we effortlessly subordinate the first to the second. Beckett in The Unnamable therefore tries to shock the reader into new habits of attention by refusing even the most basic of our expectations from art, that we should discern in the narrative persona vestiges of our own

humanity, recognise something of ourselves in the narrated matter. The question we are left with is only a different version of that posed at the beginning: 'Where now?'

What remains after Beckett has systematically before our eyes razed the ground, after our every habitual desire for narrative or metaphysical or lyrical excursus has been anticipated, flirted with and ultimately frustrated by an artist whose whole purpose is to make us face up to the artificiality of all inventions? Whenever the reader starts to relax or suspend his disbelief, the ventriloquist steps forward from behind his creation, pointing to himself and snarling with despair: 'the whole fabrication might collapse...it was clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist' (p.351). It is a portrait of the artist in hell, a claustral echo-chamber of his own making. With the decision to strip the narrating voice of any vestige of human identity comes the impossibility of linking the plight of the artist to that of the layman: the Unnamable has no limbs on which to hang the tramps' clothes and wretched physical circumstances which Beckett had made, for Watt and Molloy and Malone, the badge of their fellowship with the dispossessed of the world, those who as he said 'have nothing'. The split in Beckett's work has already taken place, and the enriched sense of believable human identity which I noted in the artist-portraiture of Malone Dies would be developed in the drama: in The Unnamable however hell is as specialised and convoluted as in Dante's circles, and the centre of suffering is unbearably concentrated and precise, a blaze of cruel light on the tired consciousness of the writer. What remains for the artist with no belief in an audience and no

belief in his trade is only to record with fierce accuracy the pain of that impasse. What The Unnamable forces the reader to live through is the moment-by-moment agony of the creative process for the artist whose critical selfconsciousness has led him to destroy everything, and so in the end almost destroy himself.

Towards the end of the Trilogy it seems that what we shall be left with is a formlessness returning us to true chaos, a chaos where the artist or utterer must indeed give up all vestiges of human speech in heart-rending grief and retreat into imitative sound-language -

> that's how it will end, in heart-rending cries, inarticulate murmurs, to be invented, as I go along, improvised, as I groan along, I'll laugh, that's how it will end, in a chuckle, chuck chuck, ow, ha , pa, I'll practise, nyum, hoo, plop, pss, nothing but emotion, bing bang, that's blows, ugh, poo, what else, ooh, aah, that's love, enough, it's tiring...(p.412)

That brief vision, the only moment, despite all his protesting, when Beckett actually abandons articulate speech, is indeed of the end of art: but in fact The Unnamable does not end in inarticulate cries. Instead, it builds to the climax of one single unbelievably protracted, panting, driven sentence, extending for three-and-a-half pages in an escalating series of short comma-ed phrases which seem to echo the narrator's every compulsive, aborted thrust of thought, and which sinks at last to (temporary, it assures us) rest in the curiously ambiguous period I quoted at the beginning of my discussion of the Trilogy:

> perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story...you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. (p.418)

After all the systematic destruction we find the faint possibility of a new beginning, a new story. The answer to the question 'Where now?' is not quite 'Back to the beginning' but it is 'Back to a beginning', in other words, back into a cycle of creation after a cycle of destruction. The Unnamable demonstrates that literature cannot subsist entirely without stories, though it can subsist off the process of their piecemeal dissolution. When logic, pattern and meaning have been entirely dissolved, the only thing to do is cast about for a new meaning, a new kind of story. Beckett was not to find his hopeful 'threshold' within the bounds of prose fiction: he had already found it, in Waiting for Godot, written between the second and third volumes of the Trilogy. This latter work therefore does indeed represent, as it had so often in its course threatened to, the end of Beckett's major sequence of prose fiction. Drastic though these last developments in Beckett's fictional portraits of the artist are, the despair in the commenting voice is a linear development from the self-doubt and ironic distance that interrupted the fun and games of More Pricks than Kicks more than a decade earlier when 'the reader...[was] requested to take notice that this sweet style is Belacqua's' (p.41). There is total internal coherence in the development of Beckett's selfconsciousness away from the self-portraiture of exuberant youth and the 'sweet style' of the literary man born and bred. Having increasingly infected his portrait of the fiction-maker with doubt, fear, exhaustion and disgust, he finally faces us in The Unnamable with blankness - blank terror, the blankness of a page that can only be filled by 'heart-rending cries', and the blunt imperative to search for a new picture, a new generic frame. Beckett

had had enough of dissecting the still-twitching corpse of the novel.

Of course, the fight is fixed, the corpse is only a dummy. Beckett sets up an unbearable stereotype of fiction: unsurprisingly, he then rejects it. Fiction in his hands becomes unbearably sterile and solipsistic, the individualistic genre distilled to an insane privatism and loneliness, simply because he rules out so many of the devices by which fiction wins a readership and a place in the world. The incentive to use such devices was naturally small by the time Beckett was working on the Trilogy with no seeming possibility of ever finding an audience - 'Sometimes you would think I was writing for the public', Moran says with mordant irony as he crumbles further and further away from respectability (Molloy, p.170). Characterisation seems to Beckett like the fag end of humanism and an evasion of the truth that the self is all the author really knows. Yet looked at from another point of view, the invention of differentiated characters is the way in which the novelist can escape from the limitations of his own self: it is his way of opening his work to others, saying that he as an individual source of perception wants also to share and depict the viewpoints of others, and deal with some recognisable world that lies between us all. Having alienated possible publishers and consequently readers with the uncompromising difficulty of Watt, Beckett was indeed in the position of the twentieth-century novelist as envisaged by the novel's most pessimistic critics - a solitary intellectual writing about solitary intellectual consciousness, for consumption in theory by other solitary

intellectuals, in practice by himself alone.

On the other hand, the uninterrupted concentration upon the isolated and tormented writing self which Beckett's peculiar biographical situation ensured resulted in the production of a group of prose works which focus with unparallelled intensity upon the convolutions of the creative mind. The writer (and even the critic or teacher who is prepared to listen to Richard Poirier in The Performing Self and approach the text as live performance rather than dead tablet[54]) will find Beckett's revelations about the creative process at its hardest fascinating. For all the diverse inventiveness of the plays, the Trilogy is perhaps Beckett's most original contribution to literature: noone else has ever injected the portrait of the artist with such pain, or shown such disregard for the reader's conventional expectations. Nevertheless, with their progressive abandonment of any reference to an invented world outside the writer's study, with their gritted determination to make narrative out of the action of narrating and nothing else, these three books become, with the partial exception of Malone Dies, books for a caste, books which any working writer will read like a diary but which other mortals may read as a confession of something like insanity. The sympathetic reader will feel immensely grateful that the books were written, yet one can hardly envisage more of the same, or see it as a way forward for fiction. It is indeed a kind of ne plus ultra for fiction, for the reason already stated - Beckett had foreclosed the possibilities before he began. The last part of the Trilogy demonstrates with all the clarity of exaggeration the

torments which critical selfconsciousness can bring upon the fiction-maker: in the end, who could bear long to examine his situation with the ruthless honesty of the Unnamable, face its horror and still deny himself the comfort of any escape into story? Malone took an inventory of his condition just as clear-sightedly, but for him narrative, picuture, poetry still offered the consolation of a way out of the solitary confinement of the self: and so did they for Beckett as he moved into the theatre and beyond this study's primary area of concern.

A reading of The Unnamable as Beckett's statement of despair about the possibility of the fictional genre is clearly too narrow and too neat for it. Nevertheless such a reading is consistent with the relative trickle of subsequent work which can loosely be categorised as prose fiction. Beckett seems to have reserved for them his blackest and most esoteric mental exercises. Fictional form is much better fitted than that of drama to the closed and static systems which he sometimes wishes to evoke. How It Is (1961), for example, with its unpunctuated rythmic vision of human relations as an endless chain of torturer and tortured, a repetitive sequence of rituals whereby the active partner inscribes his desires on the flesh of the passive and later becomes victim in his turn, is far too long for the stage, and delivered in a deliberate stylistic monotone ill-suited to theatrical entertainment. Coming late to the stage, Beckett accepted its conventional imperative to entertain as a liberating challenge. Similarly apt for Beckettian prose are the repetitive and sterile rituals of The Lost Ones (1971), a text which is literally a closed system, depicting a dying culture in a

locked cylindrical universe, whose strictly regularised law of motion can do nothing to prevent the running-down of the whole. The titles of such pieces as Imagination Dead Imagine (1965), Lessness (1969), and For to End Yet Again and Other Fizzles (1976) are indicative, falling into the sequence resoundingly begun by Texts for Nothing. These later prose texts are gestures made against the sucking power of the vacuum, and sometimes they simply record how the vacuum defeats them, then peter out -

> what a blessing it's all down the drain, nothing ever as much as begun, nothing ever but nothing and never, nothing ever but lifeless words.[55]

The stage does not comfortably house 'lifeless words': paper is more docile.

How It Is and The Lost Ones are the longest prose texts written since the Trilogy. The shorter texts such as those listed above seem to do two primary things. On the one hand they evoke still more skeletal and dream-like states of torment or paralysis than those of How It Is and The Lost Ones: in Imagination Dead Imagine, for example, two still white bodies lie back-to-back scarcely breathing, pinned in foetal position as the white light ebbs and flows: in Ping (1966) there seems to be only one body, 'Bare white body fixed white on white invisible'.[56] On the other hand they are the tense, breathless accounts of the effort of their own creation, records of solitary artistic experiment way out on the far fringe of possibility, finding a form somewhere on the difficult edge between words and silence - 'Ping murmur only just almost never one second perhaps a meaning that much memory almost never.'[57] Such words as have been drawn forth have already for the most part been erased again - 'Now

I'll wipe out everything but the flowers. No more rain...'[58] The text comes ready-destroyed: this is what Beckett means by calling these late works 'Residua', all that remains from the battle with nothingness. The no-man's land between words and silence is of course a literal state of torment and paralysis for the artist, so form and content are once again intersections of the same cerebral frame. Beckett seems to have reserved his most painful and difficult experiments for prose, a genre which he decided twenty-five years ago threatened to 'end...in heartrending cries, inarticulate murmurs' (The Unnamable, p.412), in speechless misery and no way forward beyond it. The speech goes on just this side of speechlessness and prevents the critic from making too neat a division of Beckett's artistic development, with theatre acting as the cathartic release of tongues. Nevertheless it is true that Beckett has produced more human accents for the stage, which is where the great bulk of his production has been since 1950: here there is a clear issue for the artist out of the mirrored cell, into the responding consciousness of a visible and audible audience.

In Beckett's prose from Watt onwards art had been portrayed as a penance mysteriously thrust upon a single unwilling practitioner. The penitential nature of the world of art is never in doubt, and it is a totally closed world. In the plays, on the other hand, Beckett shows the wide variety of motivation that causes a wide variety of men to turn to invention and articulate speech, for comfort or entertainment, rather than pain. The world of art is opened up, and we are given glimpses of men employing some kind of creative gift in an attempt to deal with their troubled situation,

ordinary men conditioned by a world which believes fictional formulae help. Although the plays still contain examples of the fiction's highly cerebral self-comment, they also offer what are by contrast lively narrative with manifest treats of image or incident, - bon-bons or sugar-plums, like those with which Hamm tempts Nagg in Endgame (1957), to seduce those who do not find the idea of selfconscious art attractive. By making the decision to move into the theatre Beckett provides an answer to one obvious accusation that can be levelled at much of the prose, that it rejects the reader's desire to identify, is indifferent to indifference and in that sense élitist or solipsistic. Beckett is the only one of my three artists to have made the move from genre to genre. Woolf, as we have seen, longed for a form which combined the strengths of fiction and drama, and attempted to find something like it in Between the Acts, which was also an attempt to break down the hierarchical distinction between the professional élite of artists and the layman: and Nabokov was both attracted to and influenced by the techniques of cinema. But Woolf and Nabokov both ended their lives unequivocally labelled 'novelist'. There may be a significant relationship between the far more sibylline, aristocratic and private portrait of the artist which emerges from their work and the inherently private nature of fictional form.

The novel is essentially a monologue, no matter how many fictional voices it employs, in terms of its consumption: the reader, solitary and silent, will experience the novel's linear sequence of speech as such. Because these solitary readers will confront the novelist's text in his absence and not give him direct evidence of

their response, the novelist for his part has complete freedom to exercise his own obsessions. In Beckett's case as we have seen the situation was further intensified by his inability to find publishers. Beckett in the Trilogy only rarely gives us the sense that his pages open outwards to an independent audience: the reader to whom an appeal is frequently made is really the author's familiar, his presumed alter ego and all-comprehending yokemate in the business of writing. If we refuse the yoke, too bad: we may not be there any way, for all he knows. Thus the artistic persona of The Unnamable, sitting dead centre in each windowless page endlessly discursing of his own imperative to speak, in one sense enjoys a licence for self-indulgence which the stage does not offer.

In choosing to spend the last three decades of his life principally involved in stage work, Beckett has moved nearer to a pure concern with art and its mechanics, art as something larger than the individual practitioner and his personal drive to utter. Here at last Beckett confronts the problem of art as a persuasive process, accepts a kind of responsibility to the 'big world' Murphy rejected. The audience in the theatre, so much more vividly present than the scattered individual readers of fiction, must be persuaded to enter into the life of the production, otherwise the company and behind them the author will have the discomfort of seeing them all walk out. The dramatist knows that the eventual transfer of meaning between him and his audience is far more focussed and far more a criterion of success or failure than that which takes place in fiction, the compensation for this vulnerability being that he has more control

over the conditions under which transfer of meaning takes place. Beckett therefore places great importance on the staging of his plays. This is apparent in the amount of time he has personally devoted to advising and in some cases actually directing performances: Deirdre Bair devotes many fascinating pages in her biography to Beckett as director, and expresses the opinion that

> 'he could not be away from theatre very long without sliding back into a depression...Much as he complained of it, the constant press of well-wishers, reporters and genuine good friends brought him out of his melancholy moroseness...he knew it and was thankful for it.'[59]

Beckett has close relationships with actors and has even written plays specifically for individual actors, Footfalls (1975) for Billy Whitelaw, Embers (1959) and Eh Joe (1966) for Jack MacGowran.[60] His stage directions are minutely precise: lighting, setting, voice-tone and movement of the players, all are carefully prescribed.

A specifically literary artist like Beckett can show no greater abnegation of self and deference to the discipline of the stage than by allowing the non-verbal dimensions of performance on occasion to take precedence over the words. A brief glance at the edition of Come and Go (1966),[61] a strange 'dramaticule' approaching ballet in its representation of three old women elliptically and secretively referring to their childhood, their loves, and the impending death of whichever of them is briefly off stage, illustrates this point: more words and space are directed to stage directions than to text. The same thing is true of Ghost Trio, a play for television (1976). There are many other examples, the most extreme being his ventures into mime, Act without Words (1957) and Act without Words II (1959),[62]

his silent film scenario, Film (produced in 1964, starring Buster Keaton[63]): and Breath (1969), the celebrated minimal drama which appears to represent human life by means of a birthcry, an inward and outward breath as the lights rise and fall, and then another cry: nothing on stage but rubbish, no actors, no words and absolutely precise instructions for the light - and sound - effects which constitute the whole stuff of the play. Unlike other writers who have turned from fiction to theatre and tried to treat the stage as a flat piece of paper approximately eight inches by four, Beckett applies himself assiduously to the special qualities of the medium: as a result, professionals of the theatre acclaim him one of themselves despite his late conversion. Jack MacGowran expresses it thus in a short essay, 'Working with Samuel Beckett':

> One of the common cries of old theatreland so often heard is 'Keep the author out!' ... There were also the very rare occasions when I shouted 'Bring the author in!' and again for very good reasons. Samuel Beckett was in the forefront of this few...[64]

This kind of interest in the performance and the effects of art is perhaps the true opposite pole to Beckett's early infatuation with his own idiosyncratic 'ipsissimossity'. His dilemmas as practising artist are still a recurrent feature of his stage work, but the physical existence of the stage (or the physical act of broadcasting in the case of his radio work) forces him to express those dilemmas through a dynamic content, to create beauty or laughter, to use recognisable human situations, to entertain.

Waiting for Godot is a play too rich and too much written-about for me to hope to add anything of substance in a few lines, but it does exemplify the new narrative possibilities Beckett had found

and the new kind of artist-portraiture he attempted through drama. The play's situation is simple, and by now well-known. Two tramps of educated origins, Vladimir and Estragon, keep up a dialogue about everything and nothing to try and entertain each other and the audience in the theatre (to whom they obliquely refer) while they wait for a mysterious Mr. Godot on a country road: he never comes. As narrative goes, this one may seem a little lacking in thrilling incident: and Vladimir and Estragon are as impotent and ignorant as ever the voices of the Trilogy were when it comes to explaining to themselves or their audience the nature of the story they are stuck inside. But one cardinal fact distinguishes Godot from The Unnamable: there are two narrating voices, and the interplay between them makes for brisk, manageable periods and easy changes of direction. Molloy and the voice of The Unnamable were both averse to paragraphs and indeed to any interruption of the endless, obsessive flow of speech which constituted their being. But human speech, the kind Beckett imitates so accurately in the plays, full of vivid slang and pithy one-liners, does employ punctuation; it most frequently has a listener, or several, in mind, and this demands frequent pauses for response.

The fact that there are two voices, with two others and a child waiting in the wings, is of course important for more than formal reasons. Vladimir and Estragon are old friends, and the play centres around the relationship between them. Apart from Murphy and Celia, a couple distinguished by true affection on one side and cerebral solipsism on the other, and the suppressed Mercier and Camier, who are in some respects a prototype for Vladimir and Estragon,

this is the first example of Beckett portraying a relationship between two thinking, feeling individuals, rather than between one solitary intellect and an alien world of people and things, or between solitary sexual subjects and their equally sequestered objects. Vladimir and Estragon need each other: which means that they use each other to ward off their fear of loneliness, love each other, hate each other, threaten to leave each other, all the familiar repertoire of human emotions which had not previously emerged in Beckett's work. And these emotions are what inspires their art - the performance they lay on for each other and ourselves, for like so many of the other dramatic characters they are surrogates for the artist. With their clownish bowler-hats, their stories and abortive attempts at stories, their formal sallies at 'good conversation', their amateur yoga and even more amateur theatricals, - 'We could play at Pozzo and Lucky'[65] - Vladimir and Estragon represent the artist as performer, which Beckett in Waiting for Godot had indeed become. But it is vitally important that they are also and primarily men. In terms of conventional narrative Godot may be something of a desert, but at least there are human footsteps across the sand. The audience can identify with the voices speaking for art: and in using their inventions Vladimir and Estragon are portrayed as sometimes comic and sometimes pathetic, but not, like the artist at the end of the fiction, dishonest or accursed. They tell stories because they are men, and bored, and afraid. Art is flawed, but it is far from being the worst of their troubles. Infinitely more than the sum of its own deficiencies, it can comfort and amuse.

Beckett reserves his keenest irony for that element of artist-portraiture which is also self-portraiture. Murphy had eyes 'cold and unwavering as a gull's'(p.26). The cold and unwavering authorial eye stares into the eyes of those artists who resemble him as fixedly and with less love than Murphy searching for his reflection in the eyes of Mr. Endon. The Unnamable dramatises Beckett's confession that at this point he can only talk 'to me about me' (p.398), and here the portrait of the artist is at its most savage. But something of the savagery of the Trilogy is heard again in the earlier plays whenever Beckett creates characters with some pretensions to stature as artists and thinkers, in other words aspirants to his own half-detested masonic order. Pozzo and Lucky in Godot are the first dramatic examples: Pozzo is vain and a bully in his arrogation of an admiring audience for his narrative set-piece about the sunset, and Lucky is a dreadful warning against pompous and allusive cerebration run amok in his demonstration of 'thinking', as we have seen (my pp.297-298).They are therefore gulls, caricatures of the isolated intellectual Beckett was ceasing to be. Two other examples of gulls or semi-gulls announce themselve in advance by their names. Krapp, the disillusioned philosopher-poet of Krapp's Last Tape (1959), and Hamm, in Endgame, (1957) bullying the suffering inferiors who surround him into expressions of interest in his 'chronicle',[66] have enough of the professional about them for Beckett to reward them with the professional's anguish. Hamm is literally a ham, casting his existence in term of theatrical melodrama; but the play seems to end with his losing the one thing he needs, an audience. Krapp's surname expresses in plain terms his retrospective opinion of his youthful quest for meaning and beauty.

Both of them suffer most horribly not from their physical decrepitude or the lack of response from the world around them but from their sense of the farcical failure of the intellect in isolation, and this is clearly a direct descendant of Beckett's own fears in the novels.

With his continuing exploration of the resources of drama, the desire to make fierce caricatures of the selfconscious artist seems to have left him. In the end, preciosity, pendantry, the technical anxieties of the solitary artists were too restricted as targets. The professional artist does not disappear from the cast list but he is given a less punishing role. Two strange and memorable radio plays of the 1960s, Words and Music (1962) and Cascando (1963), present the professional craftsman at his most professional. They both show the unadorned drama of the process by which words are combined into poem or story and set to music, and the artist, called 'Croak' in the first and 'Opener' in the second, exists quite simply as a skilled, patient technician who works to achieve his desired effects. Horror, loathing, disgust, any sense of pretence or posture are gone: Croak and Opener simply do their difficult job, and show the audience how it is done. They suffer, their materials are intractable, and their memories painful, but they have become indifferent to self-doubt and the doubts of the world, they get on with their work:

> Opener: ...They don't see me, they don't see what I do...
> I don't protest any more, I don't say any more...
> I don't answer any more.
> I open and close.[67]

It does not matter that Opener is clearly a specialist in the business of narrative, now that narrative itself has been absolved. So the

gull's eyes stare angrily into their own depths only in the earlier works: after the plays of the 1950s, there are no more gulls.

The debate about the value and purpose of narrative which Beckett conducted so fiercely in his novels thus moves into a different register. The plays are not interested in the abstract question of whether literary fictions can be anything other than false, though Beckett remains acutely conscious of the specific falsity of certain kinds of fiction of optimism, such as Joe's repeated promise to the lady-loves he abuses that 'The best's to come' in Eh Joe,[68] or Winnie's conviction after another span of torture buried in the baking earth that she has had 'another happy day'.[69] The clearest example is the biblical text in All that Fall which asserts that 'The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down': meanwhile, the little child falls on the railway line and is killed, and the Rooneys limp on with 'Dragging feet', hopelessly 'bowed down', and gripped by 'wild laughter' at religious fictions.[70] Nevertheless, this biting satire upon some of the particularly bland stories men propagate to paper over the pain of life is not at all the same as the Trilogy's refusal to paper over the void of fear and boredom with anything at all. The plays show some fictions to be both intrinsically fascinating and beautiful: more important, they demonstrate that in any case the drive to fiction cannot be denied. Nor do the plays share the novels' anxiety about their own status as invented and authored speech. Though the characters of the plays at first make frequent uneasy reference to the theatricality of the occasion in

which they are involved, - to their own ability to see the audience just as the audience can see them, - the volume of this kind of selfconsciousness, abundant in Godot and Endgame,[71] steadily diminishes. Progressively, attention to the content of art and its relation to a non-artificial context, that of the diversity of human need, becomes more important. In Happy Days (1961) Winnie gives her extended parody of a stupid spectator's reactions -

> What's she doing? he says - What's the idea? he says - stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground - coarse fellow - What does it mean? he says - What's it meant to mean? - and so on...[72]

The wry allusion to our presence as a theatrical audience at the staging of a theatrical fiction may to some extent lighten the dragging weight of our identification with Winnie's state: on the other hand fiction is not to be scorned, for Winnie is in desperate need of her own chattering fictions. These later incidences of the so-called 'alienation effect' do not really serve to alienate belief, for the protagonists of Play (1964) or Not I (1973) suffer physical entrapment in theatrical ritual just as real as Winnie's in the earth. The dramatic process is one of unambiguous weight and solidity, and therefore their cries serve to enhance the authenticity of proceedings rather than exposing a dimension of sham.

The plays in fact derive their energy from this new central premise: all men need fiction, true or false, and return to it in all their variety again and again. From this basic assumption springs to life a dramatic gallery of utterers, poets and entertainers who are a world away from the arcane literary men of the fiction. The range of immediate motives which Beckett gives the storytellers

in the drama is interestingly wide but they are nearly all drawn from the stock of common emotional experience, with none of the obscurity of the fictional artists' drive to speech. There is corroding anger or guilt (in Eh Joe the voice of one of Joe's past loves taunts him with the story of the suicide of another, in Endgame Clov tells a story to remind his oppressor Hamm of Mother Pegg who 'died...Of darkness',[73] when Hamm meanly refused her oil for her lamp). There is the desire for creature comfort (Mrs Rooney in All that Fall (1957) using literary language as a kind of verbal blanket to insulate her against an intemperate world). There is the exorcism of private distress (Estragon longing to tell Vladimir his bad dream, or V., the bereaved mother in Footfalls (1976), endlessly rehearsing the past). There is a more comprehensive category too, human fear of the loneliness and boredom of silence. The best-known example of this is the dialogue of Vladimir and Estragon, urging each other on in deadly fear of falling quiet:

> Vladimir: Say something.
> Estragon: I'm trying.
> Long silence.
> Vladimir: (in anguish) Say anything at all![74]

Henry in Embers presents a similar case. His long monologue is a way of deferring the end of the play, when after all his reminiscences of those he has loved, betrayed and driven away, he has to face the lonely void of his present life as revealed by his diary:

> Henry: ...On...Little book. (Pause.) This evening...(Pause.) Nothing this evening. (Pause.) Tomorrow...tomorrow... plumber at nine, then nothing. (Pause.)...Words. (Pause.) Saturday...nothing. Sunday...Sunday... nothing all day. (Pause.) Nothing, all day nothing. (Pause.) All day all night nothing. (Pause.) Not a sound.[75]

At the very least, art can offer the sound that takes the terror from the silence. It is essentially a simple and a central service that the thinking self can do for the self which feels: self-consciousness in the plays no longer implies the policing of the heart by the mind.

Two of the most recent plays, Not I (1973)[76] and That Time (1976),[77] summarise in their careful distillation of form many of the central themes of the plays and tell much about Beckett's ultimate ideas about art and the role of the artist. They are both short, Not I taking up fifteen minutes in performance, That Time twenty-five; in this . they are representative of all the brief dramatic pieces gathered together in the 1977 collection, Ends and Odds: Plays and Sketches. Both of these late plays are set entirely within the consciousness of a single person: they resume the stance inside the solitary imagination from which Waiting for Godot departed with its notion of art as a playground for the whole troupe of men. Only ghosts of images, an 'Old white face, long flaring white hair' in That Time (p.9), a faintly-gleaming mouth and shrouded listening figure in Not I, appear in lieu of characters. We are being invited inside the psyche, a more intimate kind of confrontation than the usual one whereby drama externalises the character's thoughts in dialogue for the benefit of the audience. Beckett tries to make the dramatised psyche belong to us all, and not to any one idiosyncratic character. These solitaries go unnamed and uncostumed because they interest author and audience for what they have to express that is universal. There is a kind of symmetry

in Beckett's movement from the plight of the solitary thinker in his novels, outwards into the first plays and now at the end back again inside the psyche: but he in no sense moves back towards the 'precious ipsissimosity' of his earlier literary persona. He is indeed once again writing from within the mind, but these minds have nothing in common with the berserkly complex machines for high-speed cerebration which gave the reader such an uncomfortable ride across the dark highways and byways of Watt and the Trilogy.

The mechanical image is appropriate because the personae of the Trilogy, with the partial exception of Malone, are notable for the divorce between their thinking and feeling selves, with the former in the steely ascendant. Thought and its written records exist in themselves and for themselves, with no wider justifying context. The terrifyingly solitary mind of The Unnamable is so far divorced from heart and limbs that one might say, by a reversal of Cartesianism, if he cannot think he will therefore cease to exist. In the main body of the plays Beckett went to the opposite extreme, and showed how the intellectual ability to invent stories was inspired by common and pressing emotional needs. It only remained for him to show from the inside how a combination of emotional and intellectual forces operate to produce patterned speech. In Not I and That Time he explores the possibilities for just such a reconciliation of the thinking and feeling selves. Possibly Murphy, the thinker, and Celia, all heart, can marry at last; it has been a long and difficult courtship.

The words of Not I are spoken by a faintly illuminated 'Mouth' while a shrouded 'Auditor' listens passively. Mouth speaks of a child abandoned by her casually-mating parents and brought up in an institution, 'practically speechless' (p.16) all her life and with 'no love of any kind' (p.13) until suddenly, at the age of 70, she is afflicted with torrents of words, and the fear that 'feeling was coming back...imagine!...feeling coming back!'(p.17) More and more vehemently Mouth insists that the protagonist of her story is 'she', an insistence meaningless outside the context of the title, Not I. Mouth is in fact avoiding the additional pain of admitting that she is telling her own story. She therefore falls back, as did the tormented narrator in The Unnamable, upon the device of inventing a character to represent her in her confessional - she, not I. Thus paradoxically a play whose monologue relates the sudden release of the feeling self, the sudden ability of the self after 70 years' suffering to communicates its pain in words, also dramatises the persisting inability of the uttering voice to confess, with that of The Unnamable, that beyond all the devices of art 'It's I who am doing this to me, I who am talking to me about me.' The culture to which this story belongs is that of absolute deprivation: 'she' is illegitimate, loveless and institutionalised. She is glimpsed talking helplessly to herself in public on dark winter evenings, 'till she saw the stare she was getting...then die of shame' (p.19), or speechless in a law court when the official inquisitor asks her 'what had she to say for herself...guilty or not guilty...stand up woman...speak up woman'(ibid) She has no mode of speech which is suitable for dealing with the custodians of official tongues: and she has no scraps or hints of

the educated references which often cling about the dramatic characters, no tatters of a privileged history. According to Deirdre Bair, Beckett gave an unusually full comment on the text which makes it clear that he was dead-set on representing literal dereliction and the least glamorous kind of reality ;

> "I knew that woman in Ireland, I knew who she was - not 'she' specifically, one single woman, but there were so many of those old crones, stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them. And I heard 'her' saying what I wrote in Not I. I actually heard it." [78]

The great achievement of Not I is that it actually explores one of Beckett's own recurring artistic dilemmas, the perpetual necessity of veiling confession in fiction, but does it by directly and movingly evoking the same problem as experienced by the simple old woman whom we hear. The truth of her own situation as we have seen appears to be ungraced by any kind of affection, security, comfort: she seeks now at last and at least to find some kind of words which will manage what she dimly wanted to explain, but could not, in court, 'something that would tell...how it was', 'something that would tell how it had been...how she had lived...lived on and on' (p.19). It is the simplest possible expression of the basic urge of the artist; to express the truth about his life, in the hope that some kind of listener will record it. Granted speech at last, she still clings to some kind of a fiction, that fiction of a third person, to console her for the desert she describes: and thus Not I provides one more demonstration of ordinary people's need for fiction. To pitch that statement at another level, people like the crone in Not I and, as we shall see, the old man in That Time, need what Beckett gives them: an imaginative role in what one might call

'official' fiction, a mouthpiece which lets them impinge on the consciousness of the high culture from which they have long been excluded. In Not I, Beckett gives his remembered old woman what no other contemporary writer does, a 'Mouth' on stage, and very much more than one 'Auditor' who may perhaps feels that shrouded figure's 'helpless compassion' (p.12).

That Time shows a much more reflective and orderly consciousness at work. It illustrates the obsessionally recurring patterns of an old man's memory, this time calm and accepting. The old white face hangs high above the stage and listens as three different voices, or rather different 'Moments of one and the same voice'(p.22), A, B, and C, portray his consciousness tunnelling back into time, to childhood, to romantic youth, to a later existence as a tramp who holed up from the wind and rain in public libraries or art galleries, and finally to a more recent but still historical self who made a trip back to the scenes of his youth, finding on arrival that the trams are no longer running and the station is boarded up. All there is left for him to do is to sit huddled on a doorstep in the sun waiting for the ferry and talking to himself, running over his history as people pass by the old drooling 'scandal' regardless,

> making it all up on the doorstep as you went along
> making yourself all up again for the millionth time
> forgetting it all where you were and what for (p.29)

There is no physical stage business at all: Beckett trusts to the sheer hypnotic power of the words themselves and the efficacy of the original startling image, the staring white face high above the darkened stage. The audience is not interested in the physical area

of the stage because we are behind that ghostly illuminated mask, inside the brain. The whole drama of That Time derives from the way in which despite its shifts and jumps memory tirelessly returns to the same tracks and in the end shapes this one man's life into some kind of significant pattern. That man is the ultimate development of Beckett's exile and wanderer, the latest great-coated dead-beat to be caught behaving like a 'scandal' in respectable public places, the male equivalent of Mouth in terms of social status.

Yet in other ways, the protagonists of That Time and Not I take up antiphonal positions. They do not so much contradict each other as represent two possible responses to the same dilemma. Mouth in Not I is still forced to divorce herself from the tales memory tells. But the three-part narrative of That Time builds together to create a central persona who can listen without apparent suffering to the voices of his own memory, and makes no irritable distinction between the self which once felt a lyrical love for life and the older, dryer self who recalls it. He does not invent a fictional third person to represent him but accepts all the shifts and changes as part of a complex but integrated self, so that even his childish self can be addressed within the secure self-recognition of a 'you'. It is tempting to make some metaphorical connection with Beckett's final attitude to his art, that of an old artist who in his work at least has accepted the different parts of himself, and admitted a shared community of suffering with other men. Deirdre Bair relates some of the physical details of the memories in the play to Beckett's own life: thus for example the ruin where the

old man played as a child could be 'the abandoned lead mines in the hills above Carrickmines'.[79] According to what Beckett told the authors of the 1978 A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, the links are not quite as specific as Bair suggests,[80] but nevertheless in age and in the reference-points of his imagination this protagonist is irresistibly reminiscent of his author, which makes this final act of identification with those who 'have nothing' of special interest.

In this play as in Not I there is none of the allusive display of erudition to which earlier Beckettian personae have been prone. Very interestingly, what does remain of culture among the protagonist's memories are two images, an art gallery and a public library where the homeless go to escape the inclement weather - '...places you hadn't to pay to get in like the Public Library that was another great thing free culture...' (p.28): in other words, culture as it comes into contact with the lowest denominator of civilisation. The form in which it is shown to reach them is dry indeed. There is the 'vast oil black with age and dirt' (p.24) in the gallery, supposed to depict some past prince or princess, in fact so hopelessly hidden behind its unrestored condition and its protective glass that all the narrator finally sees as he peers closer and closer is the reflection of a face in the glass, presumably his own face. He can see no further, perhaps a comment on the fact Beckett accepts in his dramatic work, that essentially an audience can only perceive and identify with versions of themselves. But the immediate point is about the unbridgeable gap between the ordinary man and official, historical culture: art in the end

disappears beneath the black weight of years and its inadequate ways of reaching the public. As for the public library, that is inhabited by its 'bevy of old ones poring on the page' (p.30). They may be the dry ghosts of former scholars, they may be those broken men scanning the papers hopelessly for jobs who can be seen in any public library: but the old eyes bent close to the page do not in themselves present a hopeful image of the final state of the book-producing industry. Beckett himself, in entering the theatre, had moved beyond the book and such stifling scenarios as the public reading room in small provincial libraries: looking back he can evoke in a single haunting image the kind of crisis on which academics are doomed to write volumes - to gather in turn that dust in which Beckett shrouds his saddening reading rooms.

What happens to the protagonist of <u>That Time</u> in the library is obscure, but it is the last of a series of memories he has referred to by the play's titular phrase, moments significant to the shaping of his life. What he decides, in this last of so many 'turning-points' (pp. 25-26) is that the act of selecting turning-points is no longer valid or possible. What he sees as he sits at the big round table in the library seems to concern the hopelessness of men's desire to survive through their books: paper in the end makes dust. The vision is linked with the more general realisation of voice B: the will to make statements of commitment or love, the will to impose our fictions of significance on history, all the acts of self-definition we make to stop otherness overwhelming us, founder in the end through weariness or age or an ultimate acceptance of the undertow to all fictions, the dissolution of the individual self that

will take place in death.

> ... when you tried and couldn't any more no words left
> to keep it out so gave it up gave up there by the
> window in the dark or moonlight gave up for good and
> let it in and nothing the worse a great shroud
> billowing in all over you on top of you and little
> or nothing the worse little or nothing (p.30)

Acceptance is the keynote of That Time: facing the end of the fight, yielding himself in the end to the true impotence and ignorance of exhaustion, the hero is 'little or nothing the worse little or nothing'. Acceptance explains why at the very end of the text the description of the dust rising up to fill the library is so quiet and so free of horror, exploring instead a possible beauty in the cyclical rhythms of flux, 'come and gone no one come and gone in no time gone in no time'. The voice is infinitely less urbane and comfortable than that of Vadim Vadimovich at the end of Nabokov's LATH, happy to hand over his chalk to the next chap and mumbling his way into sleep, for in Beckett there are far more radical doubts about the continuity of culture, and the chalk he hands on has already been crumbled to dust. Yet both selfconscious writers in a sense, at the latter end of their writing lives, accept that the uttering self must be seen as a link in a long chain of uttering selves if it is to have meaning when the personal voice falls quiet. After the final words of the play there is a deliberate stageing of silence for ten seconds, presumably a metaphor for the threatened end of speech. For the last five seconds of that silence the old man's face, for the first time in the play showing expression, holds a 'smile, toothless for preference' (p.30). And the artist may well smile, because as an aesthetic structure the play states the case against the very end of voices which its prose-poetry describes. First, the image of the old man survives his text, hanging on palely

for those vital silent seconds over the stage. Secondly, the play lives on in the memory of the audience, has meaning and survives long after the particular illuminated face of the particular actor faded from the temporary theatrical space where this universal and enduring drama is enacted. We do not know the protagonist's name, because he has outlived a merely individual selfhood. Insofar as he portrays his own author, Beckettian selfconsciousness here is indeed the consciousness of what links all our dying selves.

In the later plays the extraordinary proper names which characterised Beckett's first novel, the Belacquas and Smeraldinas and Fricas and Albas, have vanished completely. Speech comes from and is addressed to nameless focusses of human energy: in Play (1964), Man, First Woman, Second Woman, in Not I Voice and Auditor, in Ghost Trio Female Voice and Male Figure, in ...but the clouds... (1976) M, W and V - man, woman and man's voice. Nameless or unnamable, these voices are indefinite about their identities because their function is to express stories which belong to what Estragon called 'all humanity'. Stripped of the particularising properties - possessions, material externals - which are characteristic of sophisticated narrative and especially the novel which Beckett had chosen to abandon, both the actor and the featureless stage in which he operates become universal. Ian Watt points out that the early novel's innovative use of contemporary proper names (rather than the names of moral qualities, mythical heros or historical figures) to identify its characters is one index of the growing importance of differentiated individuals during the rise of the bourgeoisie.[81] If the novel was an eventual replacement in terms of

importance and popularity for the epic art of the middle ages and earlier, Beckett in breaking down the novel form so long afterwards may be seen as attempting to move art back towards something epic or choric where the interest lies in what links men, rather than what divides them.

There are analogies between Beckett's unnamable selves pursuing their repetitive litanies of love and need where the boundaries of interpersonal differentiation blur, and the works of diverse other contemporary writers and thinkers. Thus for example in Nathalie Sarraute's novels the characters lose definition and blend into an obsessional web of fears and wishes, conversation and subconversation which comprehends and speaks for them all.[82] Again, there are direct analogies between a work like Beckett's Play and the universalised verbal rituals which R.D. Laing codifies into brief playlets of prose-poems in Knots (1970). In Roland Barthes' far more academic recent work, A Lover's Discourse: Fragments (1977),[83] the first person, like Beckett's first person, is not just the author but all the lovers in literature and history whom he allows to speak through his 'I', all the contemporary lovers (including the reader) whom he seeks to represent. It is the discourse that is important, not the individual lover. More generally, as I suggested in my first chapter (pp. 92-97) there is a trend in contemporary critical thought which has sought to abolish the individual author, as isolated fons et origo of his works, and see them rather as the product of their culture. All these thinkers seem to be trying to escape from the limitations of the exclusively individualistic and thus potentially fragmenting or trivialising

vision which the novel and the three centuries of culture that fostered it have tended to assume. Success at a literal level of any attempt by Beckett to help art reassume a choric function is of course impossible, insofar as Beckett can only represent everyman, on stage or on the page; he cannot hope to attract more than a restricted sector of privileged men into the theatre or bookshop. The lovers who unpick Laing's Knots or recognise their voices in Barthes' Discourse will also be of a specialised caste. Nevertheless the attempt is significant because it reflects a radical ambiguity in this century's attitudes towards individualism. The Romantic notion of the individual self is still deeply inscribed as a value in both high and popular culture: the intellectual cannot entirely evade this inheritance, yet he is increasingly suspicious of it, reading the Romantic fiction in the shadow of Freudian and Marxian alternative fictions, and the facts of two World Wars. Beckett's work reflects the fundamental schism in twentieth-century attitudes towards individual selfhood as neither of my other selfconscious authors do.

Especially in his major sequence of novels, Beckett mounts a frontal assault on any clouds of Romantic glory that still cling around the pathetic human frame. Beckett's men are determinedly animal: they shit and piss and masturbate and fart with exhausting regularity, they are often staggeringly violent and cruel, their relationships are based on lies and bullying and their appearance is distinctly unromantic - usually filthy, clumsy, grotesque, suffering from undignified bodily ills and old age. But it is important that the derelict heros have not always been poor, but

are one-time gentlemen, now revealed without the Emperor's clothes of polite class to which we unthinkingly defer.[84] For all the Latin tags and philosophical allusions engarlanding their necks, these literate heros are indisseverably linked to their broken feet and their broken principles, their painful bowels and pathetic genitals, and thus to all mankind. However, having deconstructed the notion of the gentleman-intellectual and the gentleman-artist, having decimated the somewhat manicured concept of self which has often been at the heart of fiction, Beckett could move on to consider with compassion and imagination the kinds of individual needs and desires which are born of social fragmentation, the loneliness and paralysis from which all human beings who are born in an individualistic culture suffer. He shows that everyone is selfconscious, that selfconsciousness is a universal condition and not just the chronic and specialised affliction from which his early artists suffer. Trying to escape from conventional literary magnification of the individual and reach towards sources of energy and feeling that all could hold in common, Beckett ends up in the paradoxical but creatively fruitful position of demonstrating that one of the thingsmen hold in common is their uneasy sense of separateness, the isolation and embarrassment of the individual self.

All the same there is one very important difference between the selfconsciousness of the layman and that which Woolf, Nabokov and Beckett make a great source of artistic strength. The layman may find that selfconsciousness paralyses him in his attempts at speech: for the professional artist, on the other hand, it galvanises.

Consciousness of what is stale or inaccurate in the literary language from which he constructs his texts drives Beckett on to fresh attempts at honesty, exactness, the precise formal equivalent to the sensation for which the form gropes. As selfconscious craftsmen my three artists for once can be aligned. The selfcritical and selfconscious artist will never be satisfied with dead formulae, worn language, all the detritus of verbal habit which prevents the artist from following Shklovsky's precept and showing afresh the stoniness, the precise particularised existence, of the stone.[85] Selfconsciousness undermines the confidence of the artist in his tradition, but in the case of the great innovating artists I have studied, it also inspires him to invent new vehicles for his thought. The breaking-down process involved in true critical selfconsciousness is more radical in Beckett's work because the crisis in his own relationship with literature is so much more severe. His artistic self-doubt is more acute than either of the others', and it is transferred directly to his pages. The disintegrative analysis which he applied to the novel and the innovations which he brought about (and is still bringing about) in the theatre aremore impressive in terms of sheer crushing scope than the innovating effects of Woolf's or Nabokov's selfconsciousness, inventive and astonishing though works like Pale Fire or Bend Sinister, The Waves or Between the Acts are. Essentially these latter works are brilliant variations on a theme, evidence that neither artist feels compelled to reject (as Beckett set out by rejecting) either literate culture or the novel. The truth may simply be that Woolf and Nabokov were happier (and luckier) both in their personal and their creative lives, so that self-scrutiny did not produce such

lacerating results. But Beckett's transformation of the difficulty and misery of selfconsciousness into art enabled him to represent and reach kinds of men and kinds of experience which Nabokov and Woolf cannot deal with, and also allowed him to transform his artistic medium in a way not possible for artists who felt relatively secure and assured where they were. The result is a body of work which at the time of writing this piece probably has more influence on new serious writing, and more status in the eyes of serious readers, than that of any other twentieth-century writer.

The end of Beckett's story is a paradoxical one, considering the derelict failures who people his pages, the single-mindedness with which he insisted on writing what he must rather than what publishers wanted, his insistence that he would do nothing in the way of publicising his personal self to encourage friendly verdicts from the literary world. Refusing to sell and therefore expose his private self through interviews or confessionals or even comments in propria persona on his own writing, he provides the ultimate proof that selfconsciousness in the literary work need have nothing to do with aggrandizing the personal self, with autobiography or self-indulgence. This is the real force which can in the end be given to the motto in The Unnamable, 'De nobis ipsis silemus' (p.332). Paradoxically, he has known tremendous personal success. The Nobel Prize (awarded in 1969) is only the greatest of the formal honours the world has offered him. Deirdre Bair in the last chapter of her biography (typically, he did not want the book written, and it is the first biographical study whose writing he has not actually prevented[86]) lists some of these honours and says that 'interest in

Beckett studies is so great in the United States that informal plans are under way as of 1978 to found a Beckett Society of America'.[87] Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman in their introduction to the substantial and indicatively-titled compilation, Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage (1979) describe the 'unparalleled proliferation of books and essays devoted to his writings' after 1961, and say that

> it is unlikely that any writer (perhaps not even Sartre, Eliot or Faulkner) has ever been so exhaustively studied while...still alive. The irony that Beckett - poet of incomprehension, enemy of systems - should be so systematically studied has been remarked many times.[88]

In the context of my study's insistence on the unnatural proliferation of literary criticism through the twentieth-century growth-industry of academic studies, the irony has a special emphasis: for Beckett's case proves that a man who deliberately renounced the world of academic literary studies himself, who wrote no further critical works after an early handful which suggested an arrogant disdain for their medium, who has consistently refused to supply critical comment on his own writing and apparently has very little time for his own critical explicators,[89] cannot escape his fate as a giant magnet for critics and teachers and students - like myself. Deirdre Baird tells us that the new biennial Journal of Beckett Studies, devoted wholly to critical writing about the writer who used 'Crritic!' as his worst term of abuse,[90] is dubbed JOBS by the scholars and critics who devote themselves to his writings'.[91] One assumes that the joke about 'JOBS for the boys' has been made many times, and that the dimension of absurd humour

in the generation of this bustling and incestuous industry from the works of the solitary bard of the unemployed has escaped nobody. At least one critic has indicated his discomfort at the situation of the prosaic explicator faced by the fragmentary poetry of Beckett's texts, exactly parallelling the situation memorably imaged by the structure of Nabokov's Pale Fire: at the end of his account of Come and Go, Hugh Kenner comments 'It is a play made of what they do not say: of silence, of silences. I have written nearly three times as many words as the text contains.'[92] Nevertheless, Beckett has refused to allow the logorrhea of the critics in any way to 'cover' (I borrow Barthes' term, see my p. 96) his spare texts. Bair recounts how Beckett put paid to his publisher's idea of publishing a book combining some of his shorter prose and critical pieces by others:

> Beckett was so scathing in his indictment of two of his most prominent American explicators and so lukewarm about the others that Seaver[93] abandoned all ideas for any writing except Beckett's own.

Beckett has never been drawn, as Nabokov was, into any kind of public debate with his critics, and it is impossible to imagine him entering publicly into any such urbane and amiable a dialogue with an explicator as Nabokov engages with Alfred Appel in Strong Opinions.[94]

In his staunch refusal to allow his texts to be changed or adapted in any way Beckett has preserved the severe and solitary beauty of his pages: Bair makes it clear how carefully he has watched over all productions of his plays for any variation not in the spirit of the text. Despite his commercial success, he has thus

in some degree escaped contamination by the hustlers of the twentieth-century art world who long to feed everything on to the escalator whose steps are the book of the film of the musical of the play of the book, and so on to the distinctly unliterary end of the line. By constant vigilance and a refusal to compromise he has preserved his private self, the self from which he writes, from the circus, and thus has avoided the ultimate condition of the literary sacré monstre or caged beast which Nabokov depicted through Vadim Vadimovich or Mr. R. The ironies, however, multiply, since the Beckett industry is capable of retrenching and turning his very refusals into a cult of secrecy more charismatic than the frank glamour of self-revelation. But the fact that in the face of enormous success and acclaim, fame and money Beckett has doggedly gone on writing bleak and unseductive texts, and that his interests have remained the same - loneliness and loss, impotence and ignorance, failure rather than success - is evidence of the thing which is perhaps most attractive and least philosophically vulnerable in the notions of individual selfhood around which so much literature has been written: for all his distaste for the cult of the individual, Beckett in his life's work has epitomised the individual as fighter, perpetually resisting the coercively standardised, the glossed-over certainties of mass culture or bourgeois convention. At the end of his life he has resisted with equal energy his own commercialisation, his own transformation into a fetishised cultural object, his own feeding into the literary-critical machine.

There is one final and linked sense in which Beckett, seeking

to record the despair of the generic Lost Ones of our century, overtly abstaining from the commitment to individualistic and humanistic values which underpins Woolf's and Nabokov's fictional worlds, nevertheless implicitly adds to the status of the individual, grants each separate thinking and feeling human animal a dignified role. This is through his depiction of the relationship between man and his physical world. I have noted throughout Beckett's work his consistent tendency to move inwards, inside the minds of his protagonists and away from the realistic description of scene and setting in which the traditional novel has taken such pride. Even in More Pricks than Kicks and Murphy, where the setting was relatively realistic, it was the seedy world of the drop-out that his characters inhabited. Dropping out, they were dropping away into a web of language and the alternative world of their own minds. As early as his 1931 study of Proust, Beckett attributed to the latter writer an artistic direction which sounds very like his own: 'The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn in to the core of the eddy.'[95] For Beckett the 'extracircumferential phenomena' of the modern material world were of little artistic interest, except insofar as he showed his characters to be both comic and touching in their ritualistic attachment to an ever-decreasing fund of physical possessions. In the end, as we have seen, they 'have nothing'. Except via the surreal parody of Happy Days he never writes of the prosperous and sometimes actually luxurious middle-class reality where Woolf's and especially Nabokov's characters dwell.

In fact, he makes the most striking and forceful critique of twentieth-century material reality possible, by quite simply excluding it from his work. It is the human creature which interests him, and not his glossy toys: and the human mind which he trusts exclusively to provide the narrative interest and variation in his works. As Elin Diamond succinctly expressed it, 'The unhealthy and often immobile protagonists in Beckett's plays are vitally creative individuals; they have to be.'[96] The fact that Beckett's narratives are never less than gripping, even when they are most painful, is a great tribute to the internal human resources on which he draws. It is also a brave counter-attack on the culture which insists on a perpetual feeding-process of external stimulus and material comforts to get us through our days. This is exactly what he depicts through Happy Days' portrait of Winnie with her little store of regularly-rotated physical props, showing that when after all the stifling desert deprives her of her mirror and her handbag, the naked and courageous will to speech and to life will survive. Disdainful of vulgar material artifice, Beckett asserts in defiance of it the power of the creative mind to generate its own alternative and nonmaterial artefacts, its own pattern and purpose. For all the overt antihumanism of Beckett's temper in The Unnamable, the demonstration is not so very far removed from that of Nabokov's Cincinnatus C. in Invitation to a Beheading, rejecting and dissolving the false fictions of an unacceptable world, going on writing his opposed testament from prison.[97]

Beckett's attack on material artifice and defence of the individual making self is consistent on all levels. First, he

challenges the assumptions of comfortable middle-class materialism by bringing his physically disgusting tramps and derelicts on to the stage. The initial audience reaction may be that they are outrageous or comic; some may simply feel, as Frank Kermode perhaps unwisely confessed in a 1960 review, that these 'grovelling exiles' are too bizarre for 'us' to identify with, that they are beyond the sphere of concern of the typical consumer of culture.[98] However, the considered reaction should be to realise that the more conventional literary hero is not in fact representative of anything but a tiny caste, that most of the world's human beings, like Beckett's men, 'have nothing', and yet they think, feel, endure, tell the story of their lives. The mechanics of this process and its shock effects are rather like those underlying Vonnegut's introduction of the physically grotesque and disreputable author Kilgore Trout to the posh ballyhoo of a literary festival, as we shall see in my last chapter. But the next stage in Beckett's implied assertion of the persistent strength of the unaccommodated human mind is simpler: he makes that the place on which the whole weight of his artistic success or failure depends. One of his boldest achievements is to show in the late plays like Not I and That Time that when nothing in the theatre but speech and a minimal human image are present, the power and the impetus of created pattern can survive.

Outside his pages, in the simplicity of his life and his rejection of the vulgar trappings of fame, in his insistence on giving away the money that success has brought, he acts out the lesson of his writing, that inward existence is more real than the existence we can buy and store and parade.[99] At its simplest, what

he has to say about the consciousness of self in the face of the false or threatening or hostile other corresponds to what Vonnegut asserts through another fictional artist, Rabo Karabekian, as we shall see in my last chapter. What remains in Beckett's last plays is what Karabekian found at the core of every insignificant or silly human individual. Despite the individual impotence and ignorance of every man in the face of his material environment, somewhere inside him there, waiting for the artist to perceive and record, is 'an unwavering band of light...'[100] It is this band which shines dazzlingly out and makes the individual names of the characters invisible, irrelevant, for under and through the words which distinguish and separate us, we grope towards parts of our selves where all suffering men in their weakness and courage and need for stories are the same.

NOTES

As in Chapter 3, I supply English titles of Beckett's works plus earliest date of publication in either language. For original titles of works first written in French and fuller bibliographical details see Beckett Bibliography.

1. 'ESTRAGON: [of Pozzo, painfully collapsed, wordless and motionless on the floor] He's all humanity.' Waiting for Godot (Paris, 1952), Act II. 1965 Faber edition, p. 83. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

2. Israel Shenker, Interview with Beckett, New York Times (5 May 1956) Section II, 1, 3. Collected in Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage, edited by Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (1979), pp. 146-159 (p. 148).

3. Shenker, p. 149.

4. Strong Opinions, p. 145.

5. See Note 8.

6. Godot, Act I, pp. 42-43.

7. pp. 43-44.

8. Beckett translated poems by André Breton, René Crevel and Paul Eluard in this special issue of This Quarter (Vol.V), guest editor André Breton. Edward Titus (the regular editor) said in his preface (p.6) that Beckett's translations of Eluard and Breton were 'characterisable only in superlatives'. He was also one of the translators of Eluard's Thorns of Thunder: Selected Poems (1932), and he translated many Surrealist texts for Negro, an anthology edited by Nancy Cunard (1934).

9. See Peggy Guggenheim, Confessions of an Art Addict (New York, 1960), pp. 48-51 (p.50), also pp. 57 and 61. See also the earlier and fuller version of this story (calling Beckett 'Oblomov') in Out of This Century: The Informal Memoirs of Peggy Guggenheim (New York, 1946), pp. 194-242. The author then called herself Marguerite Guggenheim.

10. transition, 16-17 (June, 1929) pp. 268-271).

11. Cunard, These Were The Hours (Illinois 1969), p. 111. See also Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography (1978), pp. 102-104. Whoroscope was published by Cunard's press in 1930.

12. The European Caravan: An Anthology of the New Spirit in European Literature, edited by Samuel Putnam, Maida Castelhun Darnton, George Reavey and Jacob Bronowski (New York, 1931), pp. 475-480. The editorial note preceded the poems on p. 475. See Bair, pp. 129-130.

13. For a summary of its contents, see John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (1964), pp. 21-23. See also Bair, pp. 145-152.

14. Not re-issued for trade until 1970. In 1966 Beckett allowed a 'Special Edition Hors Commerce for Scholars' to be printed. All references in the text are to the 1974 Picador edition.

15. See my p.326. All references are to the 1973 Picador edition.

16. Kenner, A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (1973), p. 41.

17. See Fletcher, Novels, p. 175. Speaking of the eyes of Sapo in Beckett's Malone Dies, Fletcher says 'Like Murphy (and, may one say, like Mr. Beckett himself) Sapo has 'gull's eyes'.'

18. Interview with Gabriel d'Aubarède in Nouvelles Litteraires (16 February 1961), 1, 7. Collected in Critical Heritage, pp. 215-217 (p. 216).

19. 1967 Foreward to King Queen Knave, p. 7.

20. Woolf, Night and Day, p.48, p. 269 and p. 260.

21. Interview with Tom Driver in Columbia University Forum (Summer 1961) pp. 21-25. Collected in Critical Heritage, pp. 217-223 (p.216).

22. Paris. See my pp.326-327 for Beckett's difficulties with publishers. All subsequent page references are to the 1963 Calder Jupiter edition.

23. Profile of Aidan Higgins, Guardian (11 October 1971). Quoted in A. Alvarez, Beckett (1973), p. 20.

24. Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965).

25. e.g. Alvarez, op.cit., p. 42, Federman, op.cit., p.114.

26. Kenner, Reader's Guide, p. 73.

27. Reader's Guide, p. 77.

28. Bair, p. 234.

29. Bair, p. 186.

30. Bair, p. 349.

31. Spectator (23 October 1953) pp. 458-459. Collected in Critical Heritage,pp. 125-129 (p.126).

32. Alvarez, p. 43.

33. Beckett was by no means indifferent to audience response. He wanted Film to reach a mass audience, and anticipated wide popular acclaim for Happy Days, see Bair, p. 584 and p. 517.

34. In Novels, pp. 91-99, especially p. 98.

35. Reader's Guide, p. 83.

36. See J. D. O'Hara, Introduction to Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by O'Hara (New Jersey, 1970), p.5. Beckett's own dashing dismissal of the language change in his interview with Shenker (see Note 2), p. 148 - he 'Just felt like it... It was more exciting for me, writing in French' - acts as a cautionary afterword to more complex hypotheses about Beckett's change of language.

37. Stories and Texts for Nothing (Paris, 1955). The eventual English titles of the novellas were 'First Love'. 'The Expelled', 'The Calmative' and 'The End'. See Beckett Bibliography.

38. Fletcher, Novels, p. 110. In 1964 Fletcher was still sure that 'the author wishes (it) to remain an unpublished novel', but it was published in Paris in 1970.

39. Mercier and Camier, 1974 edition, p.9.

40. 'The Calmative', Four Novellas (1970) pp. 51-68 (p.53).

41. See Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (New York, 1961), p. 24. See also Bair, p. 346.

42. Bair writes interestingly about the autobiographical element in the play, and Beckett's refusal to part with this among all his other manuscripts, in the Biography, pp. 385-389.

43. Molloy and Malone Dies were published in Paris, 1951, and The Unnamable in Paris, 1953. All page references are to the 1960 Calder edition of Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable, hereafter referred to as the Trilogy.

44. First published 1955, See Note 37.

45. Actually inserted by Beckett at the stage of English translation, as Fletcher remarks (Novels, p. 134).

46. Endymion: A Poetic Romance (1818) Book 1, Line 1. Collected in John Keats, Poetical Works, edited by H. W. Garrod (1970), pp. 53-57 (p.55).

'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness...'

47. King Queen Knave, p. 112.

48. 'Place of Narration/Narration of Place', in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Criticism, edited by Ruby Cohn (New York 1975), pp. 96-110 (p.96 and p. 103).

49. Bair, p. 640.

50. Driver, op. cit., p. 219.

51. See Bair, p. 562: '...the 'important writing' always means prose'.

52. See Note 111 to my Chapter 1.

53. See Bair, e.g. p. 331 and p. 387.

54. The Performing Self, passim. On p.84 Poirier attacks the prevailing critical 'illusion about the power of literature as a series of finished works, rather than a feeling for the power, still generating in those works, of the retraceable acts of writing, composition, performance.'

55. Texts for Nothing. Collected in No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1966 (1967), pp. 71-133 (p.131).

56. Paris. Collected in No's Knife, pp. 165-168.

57. Op. cit., p. 166.

58. Enough (Paris, 1966). Collected in No's Knife, pp. 153-159 (p.159).

59. Bair, pp.635-636. The present author found Beckett's direction of Billy Whitelaw in Happy Days at the Royal Court Theatre during the writing of this chapter exquisitely paced and intensely exciting. The interpretation was strikingly theatrical, unafraid of broad humour in the first act (great play was made of the moment when Willie replaces the soaked handkerchief on which he has just blown his nose on his bald skull) and equally unafraid of a directly emotional reading of the eventual meeting between Winnie and Willie, which despite the ambiguity of the text was made a matter of wrenching pain and love.

60. See Bair, p. 636 and p. 554. Eh Joe was first published in Eh Joe and Other Writings (1967) with a dustjacket illustrated by a photograph of Jack McGowran in the BBC television production of 1966, directed by Beckett.

61. I refer to the 1973 Calder edition.

62. Act Without Words I was first published in Endgame, Followed by Act Without Words (Paris, 1957). Act Without Words II was first published in New Departures, 1 (Summer, 1959) pp. 89-90.

63. The screenplay was published in 1967. See Bair, pp. 570-575 for a fascinating account of the physical difficulties Beckett transcended during actual production.

64. Collected in Beckett at Sixty: A Festschrift (1967), pp. 23-24 (p.24).

65. Godot, Act II, p. 72.

66. Endgame, 1964 edition, p. 40.

67. Collected in Play and Two Short Pieces for Radio (1964): 1968 edition, pp. 38-48 (p.43).

68. 1967 edition, p. 16.

69. Happy Days (New York, 1961), 1966 edition, Act II, p. 47.

70. 1957. 1975 edition, p. 39.

71. See Godot e.g. Act I, pp. 34-35, Act II, p. 74 and p. 91. See Endgame e.g. p. 25, p. 39, p. 51.

72. Happy Days, Act I, p. 32.

73. p. 48.

74. Godot, Act I, p. 63.

75. Embers, collected in Krapp's Last Tape and Embers, 1959. 1969 edition, p. 39.

76. Collected in Ends and Odds: Plays and Sketches (New York, 1976) pp. 11-20. All page references are to this edition.

77. All page references are to 1976 separate edition.

78. Bair, p. 622.

79. Bair, p. 636.

80. Op. cit., edited by John Fletcher, Beryl Fletcher, Barry Smith and Walter Bachem (1978), p. 204. Bair suggests that the gallery in That Time is a depiction of the National Portrait Gallery where Beckett sometimes huddled in the 1930s. According to the editors of Students' Guide 'Beckett had no particular gallery in mind but says that it could be the London one'.

81. Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957), pp. 18-21.

82. See e.g. Sarraute's Les Fruits d'or (Paris, 1963), Entre la vie et la mort (Paris, 1968), Vous les entendez? (Paris, 1972).

83. Fragments d'un discours amoureux (Paris, 1977). Translated by Richard Howard, 1979.

84. See Vivian Mercier, Beckett/Beckett (New York 1977), Chapter 3, 'Gentleman/Tramp', pp. 46-92.

85. See also my Chapter 1, Note 109.

86. In her Preface Bair says 'I am sure he did not want this book written and would have been grateful if I had abandoned it' (p. xii). She also describes how Beckett eventually decided to suppress the biographical material that was to have been included in Lawrence Harvey's critical study (pp. 545-547).

87. Bair, p. 632.

88. Op. cit., p.27.

89. Bair tells how he put paid to the idea of a Grove Press compilation of Beckett texts and essays by critics. 'As to the critical articles...Beckett was so scathing in his indictment of two of his most prominent American explicators and so lukewarm about the others that Seaver abandoned all ideas for any writing except Beckett's own.' (p.611)

90. Godot, Act II, p. 75.

91. Bair, p. 632. Journal of Beckett Studies (edited by James Knowlson) was intended to be published twice a year, Winter and Summer, but so far issues 1-3 have appeared in Winter 1976, Summer 1977, Summer 1978.

92. Reader's Guide, p. 175.

93. Bair, p. 611.

94. See Strong Opinions, pp. 285-286.

95. Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit (1965), pp. 65-66.

96. Diamond, '"What?...who?...no!...she!"' The Fictionalizers in Beckett's Plays', in Cohn, op. cit., pp. 111-119 (p. 111).

97. See my Chapter 3, pp. 25-26 on Invitation to a Beheading.

98. Encounter (July 1960) pp. 73-76. Collected in Critical Heritage, pp. 198-205 (p. 205).

99. Bair writes about the difference between Beckett's part of his Paris apartment and that of his wife Suzanne. 'He had a sitting room, with a plain, angular sofa, a chair, a wooden table and bookcases...In his bedroom were only a thin cot covered by an undistinguished spread and an ordinary chest of drawers. By contrast, Suzanne's section of the apartment was crammed with large French furniture; every bit of the wall and floor space was hung or filled with an assortment of heavy, baroque objects.' (p. 534) She cites many instances of Beckett's generosity as well as making the blanket statement that 'Actors, writers, old friends, casual acquaintances - all were recipients of Beckett's generosity. Few had to ask for help, and he offered it if he even sensed the slightest need.' (p. 579).

100. Vonnegut, Breakfast of Champions, p. 205: See title of Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

A CONTINUOUS TRADITION, AN UNWAVERING BAND OF LIGHT

Beckett's characters, as we have seen, end up living in a region empty of properties: they live among their memories, their strange repetitive fictions, locked within the mind. Outside, the most memorable visions we have been given of a world are mud and confusion, in the Trilogy and How It is, for example, or worse, in Endgame - 'Outside of here it's death', Hamm says (p.15). Beauty appears only in flashes of memory or painful desire, fragments of something which has been irrevocably ruined or lost but still haunts the poet's inner eye:-

> '...here we're down in a hole. But out there beyond the hills? Eh? Perhaps it's still green. Eh?'
> (Endgame, p.30)

Beckett's fictional world is in a sense already a post-holocaust world, and in this as in most other senses he represents a fascinating extreme rather than a pattern for selfconscious fiction. But all the same, there is something very suggestive about the fact that those idyllic images of natural beauty, sea and stars, 'egg-blue sky and scamper of little clouds', are always in the past, and some sterile detritus has replaced them: 'the blue there was then the white dust impressions of a more recent date...' (How It Is, pp. 31 and 78). The theme occurs again and again: this beautiful passage from Molloy about the moon is really about the withdrawal of that natural beauty:

> ...that vast yellow light sailing slowly behind my bars

> and which little by little the dense wall devoured, and finally eclipsed...a radiance scored with shadow, then a brief quivering of leaves, if they were leaves, then that too went out, leaving me in the dark. (Trilogy, p.39)

Something terrible has happened to Beckett's world. The dust and the dense wall have covered the face of nature, leaving the author in the dark with a tape recorder and a toy dog. If light returns, it will only be within the stripped white intensity of his mind. I think there is an analogy to the material facts of our extraordinary culture, an analogy which becomes explicit in many other selfconscious writers who let the contemporary phenomenal world impinge more literally upon their texts.

Thus Nabokov in Transparent Things is a fascinated observer of the plastic cosmopolitanism of tourist Switzerland, the recurrent irruptions of 'construction work...scarring and muddying the entire hillside...' (p.37), the hot chocolate which is really a sachet of 'beige dust' added, with horrible results, to 'ruthlessly homogenised milk' (p.47). Vonnegut's Breakfast of Champions moves between tragedy and farce with the image of the author Kilgore Trout wading through the ironically-named Sugar Creek, a channel so heavily polluted by the waste disposal system of a 'new anti-personnel bomb' which scatters plastic pellets (cheaper than steel, impossible to detect in the body by X-Ray) that his feet become coated with impervious plastic. Vonnegut gives a diagram of the structure of the plastic molecule which sprawls all over two thirds of a page, and comments 'The molecule went on and on and on, repeating itself forever to form a sheet both tough and poreless'.[1] A similar motif occurs in Richard Brautigan's In Watermelon Sugar: by an act of rather whimsical creative imagination most of the world is made of sugar, but in the background

is something more sinister, a giant junk-yard of 'Forgotten Works'

> that gradually towered above us until the big piles of forgotten works were mountains that went on for at least a million miles...There were no plants growing and no animals living in the Forgotten Works. There was not even so much as a blade of grass in there, and the birds refused to fly over the place.[2]

In Norman Mailer's Why Are We In Vietnam, a group of well-heeled would-be sportsmen from 'the high technological nexus and over-developed civilisation of a megacity like Dallas'[3] set out in search of nature in the Alaskan wilderness, and their safari tour sees that they

> all go to bed in rooms with a foam-rubber mattress, pink-tile bathrooms, and Venetian blinds, and, in the morning, load gear and all ten men into three Piper Apaches with amphibian floats and take off for the Brooks Range...[4]

By comparison, the physical world of Woolf's Between the Acts seems full of birdsong, grapes and the scent of geraniums, cows with their 'great moon-eyed heads' (p.99), pear-trees, swallows, a unified and natural world. And yet threatening planes are already flying over as well as swallows, the book begins with a reminder that modern sanitation is coming to the village, and omens of the future already add an elegiac framework to Woolf's evocation of sunlight and unity -

> The future shadowed their present, like the sun coming through the many-veined transparent vine leaf; a criss-cross of lines making no pattern. (p.107)

This study of selfconscious fiction, like all of the texts I have just quoted, is being written from the standpoint of that future. Looking around my room I see a succession of artifices: everything is constructed, man-made, even the floor is twenty feet above the surface of solid earth and the ceiling is some fifteen feet away from the sky. Since the beginning of human civilisation, but

infinitely more rapidly and dramatically since the beginning of the twentieth century, mankind has covered the surface of the natural world with a layer of artifice, in the case of high-rise urban civilisation with layer upon layer. I can see the sky (just, between the roofs of other houses, and through a pane of glass) but I can see no grass or trees. On the other hand inside my waterless room I have pictures of sky, pictures of trees, dried and tinted flowers - more artifice. The average citizen of our artificial world, like the average battery-chicken on a poultry-farm, probably accepts the world he is born into as the norm, and thus effectively naturalises the artifice. The selfconscious novelist, as we have seen in the foregoing selection of passages, is very aware - often uneasily aware - that men are living in a world they have literally made for themselves, that the neutral adjective 'man-made' is beginning to acquire devastatingly universal significance even as it retreats into a background of universal and passive acceptance. Selfconscious fictionists are used to exploring their own artifices, so their critical perceptions can help illuminate for us the glass and steel and plastic labyrinth of our environment for which their own paper labyrinths are a model.

However, the artifice that invades our material world is only the outward and visible sign of another. That layer of glass and steel and plastic is the context of our twentieth-century realisation that the webs of discourse with which we try to cover the world are equally provisional and artificial, culturally and historically determined and in their turn determining our view of the phenomena they seek to describe. The logical twentieth-century outcome of the

scepticism which my introduction traced back to the nineteenth-century German Idealist philosophers and beyond is the state of affairs which Bradbury notes in Possibilities, p.21:

> ...fictionality is regarded as the common attribute of all forms of discourse, even when these are ostensibly factual, reportorial, and analytical...

Barthes' important early work, Mythologies (1957),[5] tracks down the invisible myths underlying things which we take to be 'natural' parts of our everyday life, from wine to all-in wrestling to soap-powders. The 'mythologist' in Barthes' sense has as his function the stripping away of innocuous surface to reveal the fictional substructure: he is then free to assess the purpose and the merits of that fiction. Undetected and unanalysed, the ideological fictions which determine conventions of thought and behaviour in our modern consumer society can only render men passive and helpless inside their structured comfort:

> ...the very end of myths is to immobilise the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions. Thus every day and everywhere, man is stopped by myths, referred by them to the motionless prototype which lives in his place, stifles him in the manner of a huge internal parasite and assigns to his activity the narrow limits within which he is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world: bourgeois pseudo-physis is in the fullest sense a prohibition for man against inventing himself....[6] [my itals.]

The merit of the selfconscious fictionist is that he combines the critical function of Barthes' radical demystifying mythologist with an entirely creative function, offering in his fictions a model of man 'inventing himself'.

We may accept the view that the world which we think we experience

directly is in fact mediated through a series of fictions, but that does not and must not leave us helplessly awash in a sea of relativisms. There are good and bad fictions, and we cannot distinguish between them until we have at least established that they are not in any absolute sense 'true'. Hitler's fictional world of the master-race and the Superman had enormous imaginative power, and sought retrospectively to establish its own authenticity by turning concept into fact, as Frank Kermode remarks in The Sense of an Ending.[7] There is a vile imaginative majesty about genocide, an ultimate insistence that the imperial fiction will prevail over millions of bodies which are only contingently true. Less absolutely evil perhaps but still insidiously poisonous are the fictions of advertising which speak to us from every side, where another kind of Superman has paid for his charisma over the counter, and no packet of soap-powder is small enough to be less than 'LARGE'. Shining as soap-powder could make it was the egalitarian myth of Free White America: novelists like Mailer and Coover and Vonnegut have shown the other side of the eagle-headed coin. Novelists are especially well-placed to deal with the plural myths which are based on 'human nature'. If this is assumed to be Barthes' mythical and 'motionless prototype', then manufacturers of baby-clothes and perambulators will go on asserting that it is 'human nature' for all women to have babies whatever the world's population-figures, and purveyors of romantic fiction will insist that it is 'human nature' for Her to be Soft as a Dove, Him Bold as a Hawk. Politicians will go on insisting it is a basic 'human right' for men to vote - especially in rigged elections and against their own interests. If on the other hand 'human nature' is really a human artefact, something which is

culturally determined and therefore open to change, man can take charge of his own choices and 'invent himself' according to less patently foolish fictions. The selfconscious fictionist offers a pattern of explication, explosion and reconstruction which can help us deal with all these areas of myth.

He has one special area of responsibility, however, which is that of literary myth or rather the myth of literature: the artist is one of the most mythified figures of our society, trailing clouds of rusty lumber from some vaguely Romantic glory-hole, invested by wistful pedagogues with a motley array of attributes like genius, unworldliness, eccentricity, solitariness, poverty, madness, - all the conventional traits which go towards what Barthes calls 'the glamorous status which bourgeois society liberally grants its spiritual representatives (so long as they remain harmless.)'[8]

Since there is little glamour attached to the actual position of struggling contemporary writers, looking hard at their world and their market and eking out their incomes with the odd mundane and vulgarly commercial assignment in television or journalism, it seems that our society likes its 'spiritual representatives' (who after all only represent us in a conceptual limbo) to be an archaic breed, a composite amalgam from once-read literary biographies and nineteenth-century novels. The conscious writer can with all the authority of personal knowledge point out that this moth-eaten stereotype is far from true. He can give a direct insight, first of all, into the crisis in the mechanics of the present-day literary world, its uneasy relationships to both academic and publishing industries. Works like Nabokov's The Gift or Transparent Things or Look at the Harlequins

lucidly expose the interconnected tricks of the trade, the beleaguered position of the author in the hands of publishers, editors, literary fashions and schools. By comic anticipation and parodic representation of the literary critic, Nabokov illustrates the real problems of the contemporary writer's relationship to criticism. Vonnegut mirrors his own long and humiliating passage towards critical esteem in the bedraggled personage of Kilgore Trout, a science fiction writer of genius who appears recurrently in Vonnegut's novels and who by the time of his appearance in Breakfast of Champions has written 'one hundred and seventeen novels and two thousand short stories', and only managed to publish them through

> a firm called World Classics Library [sic] which published hard-core pornography in Los Angeles, California. They used his stories, which usually didn't even have women in them, to give bulk to books and magazines of salacious pictures...[9]

Thus far the unromanticised portraits of the artist which we find in contemporary selfconscious novels have an informative and demythologising function. But the artist also depicts himself at work before the marketing process has begun, and there he has a far wider significance. This is where he can indeed be what Barthes calls a 'spiritual representative', if the reader will make the necessary investment of attention and belief in concrete and living example rather than tired archetype. By showing how he conceives and orders the world (which will bear at least a metaphorical relationship to the world which novelist and reader share) the selfconscious artist gives a demonstration of how human thought orders and understands reality. Michel Butor in an essay called 'The Novel as Research' (1968) conceives of fiction as

> the phenomenological realm par excellence, the best possible place to study how reality appears to us, or might appear; that is why the novel is the laboratory of narrative.[10]

As my chapter on Beckett has illustrated, men can only understand their world by telling stories: they might understand it that much better if they reflected more about the story-telling process, and that is what the selfconscious novelist seeks to help them do.

It may seem odd to assert that the contemporary selfconscious novel represents an absolute kind of realism when my Chapter 1 described the virtual demise of nineteenth-century realism, and in the face of critical accounts like Robert Scholes' The Fabulators (New York, 1967) which rightly points to the overtly non-mimetic and 'designed' quality of the worlds of Lawrence Durrell, John Barth, John Hawkes and Kurt Vonnegut. But in most important ways, the selfconscious novel seems to me both realistic and responsible. Its special brand of realism associates it directly with the eighteenth century's own rejection of smooth transitions and rotund overviews, for Tristram Shandy already managed to be both empirical and fantastic. The selfconscious novel refuses to be joined in a seamless web to the world: instead it reflects the actual facts of its status as the produce of a working writer, as a commodity in the book trade, as an artefact of print and paper, as an authored and delimited fiction set against a world of limitless fictionality. When I call the self-conscious author 'responsible', I mean he has a vital function in the extraliterary world which is closely connected with this complex kind of realism. I do not mean to affront with a crass imposition of duty the aristocratic disdain of a selfconscious master like Nabokov for any predictable employment in the world. I do however mean to challenge the common assumption that literature must be characterised by what Robert Escarpit calls

> the 'search for gratuitousness.' Any work which is not functional, but an end in itself, is literature. Each act of reading which is not a means to an end, one which satisfies a cultural, nonutilitarian end, is literature.[11]

Gratuitousness may seem a graceful virtue to a scholar of literature, but the non-specialist is more likely to think it a term of abuse. Since it might superficially seem to be especially appropriate to a group of writers like our own who reject the more obvious <u>illusion</u> of realism which the layman expects, it seems important to claim that in fact selfconscious novels seek above all to be truthful, and take on the responsibility of helping the reader find his own truth.

The exemplary statement of this position in the field of theatre is the theory which supports Brecht's 'alienation effect', that deliberate disruption of theatrical illusion which is very much akin to the selfconscious novelist's procedures for pointing up the fictionality of his world. Early in <u>The Messingkauf Dialogues</u> 'The Philosopher' supplies a distinction between traditional realism (which involves unreflective empathy between spectator and dramatic 'character', unconditional belief in the illusion on stage) and Brecht's realism, which depends on the audience being critically aware that they are watching something constructed, and a deliberate separation between the actor and his part:

> what you called realism doesn't seem to have been realism at all. The term 'realistic' was simply stuck on mere photographic reproductions of reality...then a new element was introduced, that of mastering reality...[12]

This is the dynamic and functional aspect of every kind of artistic selfconsciousness: it insists that we cannot know 'reality' merely by a process of passive reflection, but must 'master' it through the active and selective exercise of understanding. Passivity only lays

us open, as Barthes reminds us, to other people's paralysing myths: this is why Brecht protests aginst the essentially passive spectator who goes to the theatre simply hoping for escape.

One of the central functions of art has always been to offer some kind of escape from the constraints and dissatisfactions of the world we live in. As the globe has grown smaller and more familiar the possibility of truly exotic escape on the literal plane has diminished: socially and geographically our world has become infinitely more homogeneous and less surprising now that there are no virgin snows or tropical orgies which have not been penetrated by explorers and reporters. The ubiquitous jet has made the world smaller and more everyday rather than larger and more marvellous. The more we have been able to plot and measure the world, cover it with airlines, Hilton hotels and telecommunication networks, the more it seems to have shrunk within the shell of artifice. In this context it is not surprising that people turn more than ever to the heightened pages of fiction for their share of exotic experience, for a sense of panoramic distance which the navigable globe has lost, for escape into a larger-than-life 'reality' of aristocratic excess. It may be objected that only the novel of realistic illusion can fulfil this need. Yet the truth of Barthes' model of the 'immobilising' function of myth paradoxically still holds: the novel of realistic illusion demands a passive reader who confides himself as completely to the imaginative control of the author as any tired businessman to the pilot of his jet. He can only escape within the limits of an externally-imposed paralysis: taking a ten-day package tour by courtesy of Harold Robbins or Jacqueline Susann, he returns meekly

to a world which is unchanged.

Selfconscious art seeks to deny the stereotype of art as holiday: it tries to dissociate itself in this respect from the ever-increasing babble of voices from television, the cinema, advertising fantasy, election speeches, popular astrology where 365 days of the year may promise a new life or a new love. And yet in a far more respectable sense it does offer a vitally important escape, an escape which is not in the pejorative sense 'escapist'. What selfconscious art offers is an escape into a separate world from whose perspective we may gain a clearer understanding of our own. The escape leads back eventually into our own world, but we ought to bring back with us new tools with which to master it. This concept is vividly reflected in a lecture called 'The Self and The Other' delivered by Ortega Y Gasset in 1939, the year of the outbreak of the second World War. Echoing Gurdjieff, he laments the fact that man in the modern world is too often 'beside himself', caught up in the frenetic pace of material reality, to be capable of reflection. He distinguishes between two mental states which his translator leaves in the original as 'untranslatable', and copes with in a footnote. There is '<u>alteración</u>', being 'always alert to what is going on outside ... [and] what is <u>other</u>' as Ortega glosses it, '"state of tumult"' as his translator appends, and '<u>ensimismamiento</u>', which is '"within-one-selfness"..."reflection","contemplation"'.[13] What the selfconscious work of art can provide is a lacuna in the bustling text of material reality through which alternative texts can be perceived, a model of meaning which can be inspected critically and quietly, a home for <u>ensimismamiento</u>. In 1939 the fearful and

unreflective rushingness of events, the power of unchecked fictions to generate hideous realities, must have been particularly clear to Ortega, and the dangers of intellectual alteración more clear. Intellectual self-possession, the exercise of all one's faculties of judgement untroubled by intrusive contingency or the blurring haste of the clock, is the gift of the Book, but in the case of selfconscious fiction the gift is an elaborate and deliberate one and comes with instructions.

It is easy, when the concepts of demythologising and demystification are so fashionable, to slip into the trap of emphasizing the negative aspect of selfconscious fictions and forget that construction and especially reconstruction is their aim. Men cannot do without fictions, as the determined and melancholy fiction-spinning activities of Beckett's characters prove: we can only make better or worse ones, with more or less awareness of what we do. The difficult project of formulating our own fictions of meaning, selfconsciously and selfcritically, will at least protect us from the alternative, passive acceptance of other people's. In a world overrun by insidious fictions the selfconscious novelist may help us find our own. The problem with all fictions is that their internal coherence is seductive: any kind of order pleases the fickle eye. Thus even Barthes, who writes so fiercely and cogently in Mythologies' last section, 'Myth Today', of the need to transpierce and evaluate artifice, can be carried away by the mythic transformational powers of plastic, and his account of its multiplying uses carries us back to the vision of consumer artifice with which this conclusion began:-

> as an immediate consequence, the age-old function of matter is modified: it is no longer the Idea, the pure

> Substance to be regained or imitated: an artificial Matter, more bountiful than all the natural deposits, is about to replace her, and to determine the very invention of forms...The hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all: the whole world can be plasticised, and even life itself...[14]

This is stylish rhetoric but it is rhetoric all the same. For the discriminating, the availability and ubiquity of plastic will merely give a clear sense of contexts in which plastic does or does not look right, and an enhanced valuation of natural substances. The sheer pervasiveness of plastic, the speed with which its myth moves, is a clear warning of the need for ensimismamiento, a retreat upon the self, a re-evaluation of the 'Idea' which underlies our own 'invention of forms'.

When so much of the surface of the 'natural' world is submerged under a scurf of artifice and effluent, one might think of it all as the discarded magical objects of modern man's unconscious mythology, desire incarnated in junk. As my quotations from Vonnegut and Brautigan indicate, the selfconscious novelists do tend to give material artifice a sharp and analytic scrutiny and a mythological reading. They are not impressed by the General Electric Company's 'monogram and motto', as recorded in Breakfast of Champions,

'PROGRESS IS OUR MOST IMPORTANT PRODUCT',

though there is an internally coherent and self-validating myth if ever I saw one.[15] Barthes envisages the 'hierarchy of substances' being dissolved by the plastic invasion, but in the face of the awful realisation that 'the whole world can be plasticised, and even life itself...' the selfconscious fiction-maker is more likely to build new hierarchies of accurately differentiated colour and texture. What

is so terrifying about an entirely plastic world is the possibility that the man who generates the myth, the dynamic desire which founds megalopolis, is also turning to plastic: 'and even life itself...' Barthes speaks with implicit approval of the invention of the plastic aorta, and most people would agree on that score (including the present author.) However, it has become a real possibility in the last decade that before long the old and rich could be almost entirely plastic confections, the products of injected hormones, spare-part surgery and the cosmetic surgeon's knife. More terrifying still, we now face the mechanical feasability of Aldous Huxley's fearful Brave New World (1932) where human personality itself could be predicted by genetic engineering. We know of the possibility of 'cloning' men, reproducing the individual as literally as a plastic Van Gogh. When ten individuals are all programmed to be exactly alike, where is the truth amongst the terrible ubiquity of fiction?

These are enormous questions, and books may seem fragile and somewhat dated entities to deal with a situation so contemporary and so vast in its implications. However, the book itself is a product of technology, an old and tough and immensely valuable one. It may serve as a model for the kind of benefits human artifice can procure. In the book technology is put to work in the service of human individuality and human cooperation, carrying the message from author to distant reader. Books are artifices, but they help us decode and sometimes discard other artifices, and they show us how to form our own. These are the two vital elements in the service which the selfconscious artist can perform for us, first pointing to the formulae which underlie our everyday 'spontaneous' behaviour,

nudging us to revise our received beliefs, and then in the end providing us with the proof that the individual still has the power to add the artefacts of his own mind to the sum total of reality. In this respect as we have seen the selfconscious fictionist represents a concentration and distillation of the function of every maker of books, and this gives him special importance in any confrontation between technology (by which I mean also social and politicaltechnology) as uncontrollable cancer, and technology as an instrument for the conscious use of man.

In erecting this critical fiction with its very large claims for selfconsciousness, I do not wish to excuse or deny the failures. In my Chapter 1 I indicated that selfconscious art may run the risk of loss of function, degenerating in the hands of lesser artists into self-indulgent excess. Brigid Brophy, Giles Gordon, sometimes B.S. Johnson and John Barth are among the many casualties here. Selfconscious fictions at their worst can be dismally self-centred and affected exercises, peripheral in the extreme to any corpus of message-bearing activity, 'gratuitous' enough to satisfy Escarpit's élitist definition of literature, parasitic upon the knowing explication of the professionalised critical industy which bigger selfconscious authors love to instruct and attack: but it is fatuous to write at length about mediocre texts which should not in some cases have been published and, being published, should at least die quickly and not endure the unnatural embalming process which critical attention provides. The fact that such texts usually fail through solipsism and irrelevance reminds us at least of the criteria by which the great selfconscious artists succeed. In this work I

have focused on three of the greatest (and largely ignored the failures): my three artists, moreover, either through simple chronology or temperament belong essentially to the heroic and modernist, rather than anarchic and postmodernist, school of thought. In literary (as opposed to general) history it is common practice to describe and understand a tendency through the best work it has produced. In this respect all literary critics propagate optimistic fictions, but the reverse practice would be fraught with tedium. I have drawn most of my material from the modernist rather than the postmodernist writers because essentially it seems to me that discontinuous, uncommented, antiliterary texts like the short fictions of Richard Brautigan, Donald Barthelme or Giles Gordon are really just analogues of that original disjunctive movement, Dada, i.e. a pause for breath and a good clear-out of dead kings and literary lumber.[16] The Dadaists effected this so amusingly and brilliantly over half a century ago that our periodic repetitions are therapeutic and important but not in themsleves very interesting. In the end even Dada had to swing back from its wholly negative pole towards synthesis and creation of meaning in the dense structures of Kurt Schwitters or Max Ernst or Hannah Hoech. It is only genious <u>once</u> to put whiskers and a suggestive pun on the face of the Mona Lisa, as Duchamp did: after that there is the long struggle to paint a new Mona Lisa, or at least to structure a Bride out of dust and glass. The organic development from Dada was Surrealism, which for all its radicalism was synthetic and metaphoric in the extreme. And this was logical enough, because though Dada was a kind of political battle-cry, it was mainly artists who responded: and it seems to me that the inner imperative of the artist,

having shattered false fictions, is to make fresh choices and give renewed meaning. This paradigm of artistic activity obviously applies more directly and specifically to artists who are selfconscious about their procedures. I think therefore there are good reasons for concentrating my study on Woolf (a classic early modernist) Nabokov (a classic early modernist but one who is acutely aware of the power of fantasy, scepticism and farce) and Beckett (primarily modernist, as is proved in the controlling sweep of literary imagination behind such works as the Trilogy, postmodernist in his eruptions of deliberate rawness and his besetting disgust with humanism and literature.)

What must be said though in deference to the current shape of selfconsciousness is that Woolf, Nabokov and Beckett all shared at times a kind of manifest gravity, lyricism and belief in organic decorums which is infinitely less apparent in the works of for example Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer or even Muriel Spark: but this change of tone and style should not blind us to the essential continuity of the selfconscious tradition. Selfconscious fictionists can adopt a wealth of superficially obscure, comic or eccentric poses and still be trying to deal with an absolutely central issue of our intellectual culture. At this end of the century, with solemnity rendered more farcical every day by the solemnly televised peace-making of men who also make neutron bombs, anarchic playfulness on the model of Vonnegut's may seem like the truest response (it is also an eminently readable response, with jokes or cartoons on almost every page, and if the selfconscious fictionist is to retain his function he must also retain a readership.) Thanks to the splendidly

protean nature of artists, the modernist/postmodernist distinction which my last paragraph used is never found straightforwardly exemplified in texts. A novelist like Vonnegut whom David Lodge includes among the postmodernists[17] (and indeed he seems an obvious qualifier in terms of the layout of his pages) may be found to be offering a cornucopia of narrative, comment and meaning, and his superficially discontinuous texts all add together to make something like an epic and fundamentally serious critique of the fantastic artifice of our times. If seriousness is camouflaged, it is less vulnerable to attack; but in the end the discontinuous and humorous postmodernist author and his more obviously decorous modernist predecessor may have a very similar role to play. This is what Vonnegut's Kilgore Trout sees in the mirror of the 'Spanish-style' lobby of a Holiday Inn, as he arrives after a lifetime of poverty to be feted by Midland City's first Festival of the Arts:

> ...he saw a red-eyed, filthy old creature who was barefoot, had his pants rolled up to his knees... Trout...stood...with his bare feet far apart and his arms outspread. 'The abominable Snowman has arrived,' he said... I have come to Midland City to have myself acknowledged before I die, as the great artist I believe myself to be.'[18]

Trout expects people to be shocked: his rhetorically grandiose self-announcement is a deliberate parody of his wretched condition. However, Milo Maritimo the desk-clerk has clearly been trained in the bastard Romantic stereotype of the artist we discussed a few pages ago, where the combination of rags and eccentricity is perfectly proper and indeed marks the authentic artist: so he welcomes Trout open-armed in a speech which combines appalling sentimentality and something like the truth.

> 'Oh Mr. Trout...teach us to sing and dance and laugh and cry. We've tried to survive so long on money and

> sex and envy and real estate...and automobiles and television and alcohol - on sawdust and broken glass!'[19]

The real pain Vonnegut injects into Milo's absurd speech relates to the pervasive horror of the consumer junk-heap we have noted in other authors. But the primary function of the selfconscious artist is to deflate false fictions, and Trout responds to Milo's call with a prosaic reminder of the real condition of the writer under the fog of poeticised expectations which his fellows impose on him.

> 'Open your eyes!' said Trout bitterly, 'Do I look like a dancer, a singer, a man of joy?' He was wearing his tuxedo now. It was a size too large for Him. He had lost much weight since high school. His pockets were crammed with mothballs. They bulged like saddlebags. 'Open your eyes!' said Trout. 'Would a man nourished by beauty look like this?' (ibid)

Kilgore Trout does not bring to Midland City easy and innocent 'joy', as his appearance should have warned Milo; he does not represent an idyllic alternative paradigm to money and sex and envy. What he does bring is a sharp reminder that art now has to propagate its alternative fictions from roots in the very same wasteland of 'sawdust and broken glass.' There is no way back to Virginia Woolf's birdsong and pear-trees, though as we have seen Beckett solved the problem by retreating entirely from the dishonest and burdensome properties of modern materiality, staging his fictions in mud or else the bare bright spaces of the mind. Kilgore Trout rejected the drab facts of his basement apartment and its parakeet, but the alternative 'science fiction' he invents about pollution turns out to be a paradigm for reality (we can only hope that Endgame will not do likewise.) Vonnegut himself does something rather similar, apparently beating a retreat into surrealist entertainment, coining wild fantasy - but we soon realise it is no more excessive than the

everyday currency of the world: no entertainment could be more surreal than the concocted America in which he writes. However, though the contemporary self-conscious artist cannot offer an easy escape into joy, he can do something more than illuminate for us the tangles of the plastic forest. He can indeed offer a kind of answer to the vital questions I raised a few pages ago, about where we find truth in the labyrinth, how we turn dust into seed: this is not quite the miracle Milo was asking for, but it has its god-like elements all the same. It is up to artists to tell us that truth is not found but made.

Another of the fictional artists in Breakfast of Champions, Rabo Karabekian, depicted as something of a fraud, makes a claim in explanation of one of his pictures which Vonnegut says (in propria persona, but admittedly within the covers of a fiction) has changed his own life.[20] If we take Karabekian's thesis seriously, despite the frenetic by-play of the scenario which breeds it, it offers a key to a reconciliation between internal artistic control and all the metonymic externals of trash and farce. It also offers a link between the fiction-making roles of Vonnegut and Nabokov, Kilgore Trout and Sebastian Knight. Karabekian says that his picture, which shows a single bright band on a plain background, is

> a picture of the awareness of every animal. It is the immaterial core of every animal - the 'I am' to which all messages are sent. It is all that is alive in any of us...It is unwavering and pure, no matter what preposterous adventures may befall us...one vertical, unwavering band of light...Our awareness is all that is alive and maybe sacred in any of us. Everything else about us is just dead machinery...[21]

Later on, when Kilgore Trout turns up again, still very much a clown with his shoeless feet coated with impervious plastic effluent

and his luggage, including his shoes and socks and two 'wide-open beaver' books, on his head, Vonnegut reminds us that under Trout's grotesque and hilarious superficies shines that same unwavering band of light.[22] The band of light is a metaphor of meaning which transpierces mess and chaos. The selfconscious artist comprehends in his stare the skin of superfluous artifice with which consumer society has covered the world, and manages to find, underneath all the 'dead machinery', a fiction of individual authenticity which can survive it. Underneath, says Vonnegut, deep inside, we are still alive. And if Kilgore Trout has that unwavering band of light inside him, there must be something inside his creator as he comes on the fictional stage, hidden by farcical dark glasses, which is also in a sense god-like.[23] The image of man as a god-like maker is surely a preferable fiction to that of man as a plastic clone. If gods seem to sit uneasily at first in postmodernist cocktail lounges, that should just teach us to revise our theological preconceptions. For it is ultimately to an earlier and more obviously solemn image of selfconscious creation that Vonnegut returns us, Nabokov's portrait of the artist Sebastian Knight, still alive at the exhausted end of a novel:

> The door opens. Sebastian Knight is disclosed lying spreadeagled on the floor of his study... 'No...' says Sebastian from the floor, 'I'm not dead. I have finished building a world, and this is my Sabbath rest.'[24]

In his recent book The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature (1977) David Lodge explored Roman Jakobson's now-famous distinction between the metaphoric and metonymic poles of language, applying it not only to specific modern authors but also to non-literary areas of human experience such as

cinema and drama, the railway train or the encyclopedia entry.[25] Tentatively following his lead (since the metaphor/metonymy distinction in its turn can presumably function as a code for understanding the world, a fiction and a metaphor), it might be suggested that epic society, the society of authorless oral-formulaic tradition, of religion and of poetry, was metaphoric in that it offered a total model of meaning: and that bourgeois society in its origins was metonymic, contingent and empirical in its mode of knowing, a society of prose and of scepticism. It is against this uncertain background that individual thinkers and individual interest-groups have generated their plurality of fictions, and it is against this background of plural fictions, usually undeclared and unsigned, that novelists have created their own self-declaring and self-portraying fictions. Each authored art-work is a signed defiance of contingency, an individual return to the comprehensive meaning that has been lost. In the microcosm of his fictional world the author can impose a totality of order, convert the metonymic flux of unperspectivised phenomena back into a total metaphor, preserving his patterns from chaos and decay in print. The fiction-maker invents a world which records his brief existence in our shared one, and compensates him for the randomness and irrationality of that journey. Lukács as we have seen described the novel form as 'an expression of... transcendental homelessness' (Theory, p.41) which itself was endemic to modern society lacking epic coherence. In the end, books are the dream homes which console us in the face of the fact that the literal end of the journey is neither planned nor constructed, for it is death: and death is no longer part of a religious pattern of meaning, it is just an arbitrary end to the text in blankness and terror.

Selfconscious fictionists invent their own buildings to stand against the void even as they are drawn inexorably towards it. If the reader can enter and live there briefly, admiring the ways in which the structure was made, he may be the more able to face up to his real metaphysical homelessness, and understand that there are alternatives to living warm and blind and helpless in the plastic security of a prefabricated globe. The selfconscious author is thus indeed a kind of secular replacement for God: signing his own alternative world and contemplating its created order, which is likely to equal in complexity that of the most organised theocracy or democracy, he reminds us that we can still create a meaningful world in our own image.

NOTES

1. Op.cit., p.210.
2. Op.cit. (San Francisco, 1968): 1973 Picador edition, pp. 74-75.
3. Op.cit., p.64.
4. p.47.
5. Paris. All page references are to 1973 Paladin edition, translated by Annette Lavers.
6. Op.cit., p.155.
7. The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York 1967), Chapter 2, 'Fictions', p.38: 'If the value of an opinion is to be tested only by its success in the world, the propositions of dementia can become as valuable as any other fictions. The validity of one's opinions of the Jews can be proved by killing six million Jews'.
8. 'The Writer on Holiday', Mythologies, pp.29-31 (p.29).

9. Op.cit., p.29.

10. In Butor, Inventory: Essays (New York, 1968): collected in Bradbury, The Novel Today, pp. 48-53 (p. 49).

11. Sociology of the Novel, p.14.

12. Bertolt Brecht, The Messingkauf Dialogues, written 1939-1942, first published Frankfurt, 1963. 1965 edition, translated by John Willett, 'The First Night', pp. 11-41 (p.26).

13. Op.cit., pp. 165-166.

14. 'Plastic', Mythologies, pp. 97-99 (pp.98-99).

15. p.266.

16. It has subsequently been pointed out to me that Frank Kermode makes a similar point in 'Objects, Jokes and Art', in Continuities (1968), Chapter 1, ii,pp. 10-27, though I had not read this essay at the time of writing. Kermode compares postmodernism and Dadaism but he does not remark upon the eventual tendency of all Dadaistic or destructive art-movements eventually to modulate towards a re-constructive movement like Surrealism: and this is my essential point here.

17. See Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature (1977), Part III, Chapter 8, 'Post-modernist Fiction', pp. 220-245 (pp. 242-243).

18. Breakfast of Champions, p. 212.

19. pp. 215-216.

20. pp. 203-207.

21. p. 205.

22. p. 208

23. p. 179.

24. The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p. 75.

25. Op.cit., Part II, Chapter 4, 'Drama and Film', pp. 81-87: see also p. 94 and p. 205.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

For the reader's convenience I have divided this Bibliography into five sections. Section (i) largely consists of works cited in my introductory and concluding chapters, together with some critical works not actually cited in the text but still influential on its development. Sections (ii), (iii) and (iv) are respectively devoted to works of Woolf, Nabokov and Beckett cited in my text, and related critical materials. Section (v) is a select list of novels illustrating the twentieth-century trend towards selfconsciousness. In general I have cited one or at most two novels by each selfconscious author, except in the case of an author like Muriel Spark whose books illustrate particularly effectively the kind of paradigms this study has discussed. To supplement the selective listing of Section (i) the reader is recommended to such excellent general bibliographical sources as Irving Adelman and Rita Dworkin's The Contemporary Novel: A Checklist of Critical Literature on the British and American Novel Since 1945 (Metuchen, New Jersey, 1972): edited by Malcolm Bradbury (1977): the Bibliography to The Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne C. Booth (Chicago 1961): and the helpful listings in Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader, edited by David Lodge (1972). Throughout this Bibliography, as elsewhere in this work, omission of geographical details indicates that place of publication includes London. Where convenient papercovered editions were used publishers are identified.

(i) GENERAL AND INTRODUCTORY

Aiken, Henry D., ed. The Age of Ideology: The Nineteenth Century Philosophers (Mentor paperback, 1956)

Allott, Miriam, ed. Novelists on the Novel (1959)

Alter, Robert. Fielding and the Nature of the Novel (Cambridge, Mass.,1968)

_____. Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre (Berkeley, 1975)

Barthes, Roland. 'Criticism as Language', 2nd Special Critical Issue of TLS, 1963: coll. in Lodge, Twentieth Century Literary Criticism (1972), q.v., pp. 647-651

_____. Image - Music - Text: Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath (Fontana, 1977)

_____. A Lover's Discourse: Fragments (1979), translated by Richard Howard from Fragments d'un discours amoureux (Paris,1977)

_____. Mythologies (1972), translated by Annette Lavers from Mythologies (Paris, 1957): Paladin edn. of translation, 1973

_____. The Pleasure of the Text (1976), translated by Richard Miller from Le plaisir du texte (Paris, 1973)

_____. S/Z (1975), translated by Richard Miller from S/Z (Paris, 1970)

_____. 'Science Versus Literature', TLS 28 September 1967: coll. in Lane, Structuralism: A Reader (1970) q.v., pp.410-416

Bateson, F.W. 'Is Your Structuralism Really Necessary?', New Review, Vol.II, 14 (May 1975), pp.55-58

Beach, Joseph Warren. The Twentieth-Century Novel: Studies in Technique (New York, 1932)

Beebe, Maurice. Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce (New York, 1964)

Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations, ed. and introduced by Hanna Arendt (New York, 1968), translated by Harry Zohn from Schriften (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1955): Fontana edn. of translation, 1973

Bergonzi, Bernard. The Situation of the Novel (1970)

Berkeley, George. See Berlin, Isaiah.

Berlin, Isaiah, ed. The Age of Enlightenment: The Eighteenth Century Philosophers (Mentor paperback, 1956)

Booth, Wayne C. The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961)

Boswell, James. The Life of Samuel Johnson, 2 Vols, 1719: Everyman paperback, 1960

Bradbury, Malcolm, ed. Contemporary Criticism (Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 12, 1970)

_____. and James McFarlane, eds. Modernism 1890-1930 (Penguin, 1976)

_____, ed. The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction (Fontana, 1977)

_____. Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel (1973)

_____. The Social Context of Modern English Literature Oxford, 1971)

Brecht, Bertolt. The Messingkauf Dialogues, translated by John Willett (1965)

Brooks, Cleanth. The Well-wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (New York, 1947)

Burgess, Anthony. The Novel Now: A Student's Guide to Contemporary Fiction (1971 rev. edn.)

Camus, Albert. The Rebel (Penguin, 1971)., translated by Anthony Bowes from L'homme revolté (Paris, 1951)

Carter, Angela. The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History (Virago paperback, 1979)

Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de. The Adventures of Don Quixote (1604-1615), translated by J. M. Cohen (Penguin, 1950)

Culler, Jonathan. Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature (1975)

Darwin, Charles. On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life (1859). Published under abbreviated joint title, The Origin of Species and The Descent of Man (Penguin, 1936)

Davies, Robert Murray, ed. The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism (1969)

Defoe, Daniel. Robinson Crusoe(1719): ed. A. Ross (Penguin, 1966)

Descartes,Rene. See Hampshire, Stuart

Eagleton, Terry. Marxism and Literary Criticism (1976)

Eliot, T. S. Selected Essays (1951)

Empson, William. Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930)

Escarpit, Robert. Sociology of Literature: 2nd English edn. with new Introduction by Malcolm Bradbury and Bryan Wilson (1971). Translated by Ernest Pick from Sociologie de la littérature (Paris, 1958)

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. See Aiken, Henry D

Fiedler, Leslie. 'Cross the Border - Close That Gap: Postmodernism', in Sphere History of Literature in the English Language, Vol.IX: American Literature Since 1900, ed. Marcus Cunliffe (1975), pp. 344-366

_____. No! in Thunder: Essays on Myth and Literature (1963)

Fielding, Henry. The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling (1749): ed. R. P. C. Mutter, (Penguin, 1966)

Flaubert, Gustave. Sentimental Education (Penguin 1964), translated by Robert Baldick from L'Education sentimentale (Paris, 1869)

Ford, Ford Maddox. The English Novel: From the Earliest Days to the Death of Joseph Conrad (1930)

Forster, E. M. Aspects of the Novel (1927): 1949 edn.

Friedman, Norman. 'Point of View in Fiction: the Development of a Critical Concept', coll. in R. M.Davies, op. cit., pp. 142-169 (first published PMLA, vol. LXX (December, 1955), pp. 1160-1184)

Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957)

Gadd, David. The Loving Friends: A Portrait of Bloomsbury (1974)

Goldmann, Lucien. Towards a Sociology of the Novel (1975), translated by Alan Sheridan from Pour une sociologie du roman (Paris, 1964)

Goodheart, Eugene. The Cult of the Ego: The Self in Modern Literature (Chicago, 1975)

Great Victorian Pictures: Their Paths to Fame. Catalogue to Royal Academy of Arts Exhibition, July-September 1978

Hampshire, Stuart, ed. The Age of Reason: The Seventeenth Century Philosophers (Mentor paperback, 1956)

Hegel, G. W. F. Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), translated by William Wallace and introduced by J. N. Findlay (Oxford, 1971)

Hobbes, Thomas. Leviathan (1651): ed. M. Oakeshott, 1946. Also see Hampshire, Stuart

Jakobson, Roman O., and Morris Halle. Fundamentals of Language (The Hague, 1956)

James, Henry. The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1934)

_____. The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel, ed. Leon Edel(1957)

Jaynes, Julian. in conversation with Sam Keen: 'The Lost Voices of the Gods: Reflections on the Dawn of Consciousness', Psychology Today (New York), Vol.XI, 6 (November, 1977), pp. 58-144

_____. The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (Boston, Mass., 1977)

Josipovici, Gabriel, ed. The Modern English Novel: The Reader, the Writer and the Work (1976)

_____. The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction(1971)

Kant, Immanuel. See Aiken, Henry D.

Keats, John. Endymion: A Poetic Romance (1818). Coll. in John Keats, Poetical Works, ed. H. W. Garrod(1970),pp. 53-157

Kenner, Hugh. The Counterfeiters: A Historical Comedy (Indiana, 1968): Anchor paperback, 1973

Kermode, Frank. Continuities (1968)

_____. Novel and Narrative (Glasgow, 1972)

_____. The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York, 1967)

Kettle, Arnold. An Introduction to the English Novel, 2 vols (1951): Grey Arrow paperback, 1962

Klinkowitz, Jerome. Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-Contemporary American Fiction (Urbana, Illinois, 1975)

_____. and John Somer, eds. The Vonnegut Statement (New York, 1973): Panther, 1975

Laing, R. D. Knots (1970)

Lane, Michael, ed. Structuralism: A Reader (1970)

Lawrence, D. H. Phoenix, ed. Edward D. McDonald (1936)

Leavis, F. R. The Common Pursuit (1952)

_____. and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment (1933)

_____. The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (1948): Penguin, 1962

Leavis, Q. D. Fiction and the Reading Public (1932): re-issue, 1965

Levi-Strauss,Claude. Structural Anthorpology (1963), translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf from Anthropologie Structurale (Paris, 1958)

Littérature, 1st Series, 1919-1921, ed. Louis Aragon, André Breton, and Phillippe Soupault. 2nd Series, 1922-1924, ed. Breton

Locke, John. See Berlin, Isaiah

Lodge, David. Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel (1966)

_____. Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism (Birmingham,1977)

_____. The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature (1977)

_____. The Novelist at the Crossroads,and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism (1971)

_____, ed. Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader (1972)

Lubbock, Percy. The Craft of Fiction (1921)

Lukács, Georg. The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, translated by John and Necke Mander (New York, 1963)

_____. The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature, translated by Anna Bostock (1971): first published, Berlin 1920

Lyly, John. Euphues and His England (1580)

_____. Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit (1578)

McEwan, Ian. First Love, Last Rites (London, 1975): Picador, 1976

Mannheim, Karl. Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge, introduced by Louis Wirth, translated by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (1936): first published, Bonn 1929

Marcuse, Herbert. An Essay on Liberation (1969)

_____. Negations: Essays in Critical Theory, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (1968)

Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848): translated by Samuel Moore, 1888. Progress Publishers' paperback edition of translation, 1952

Murdoch, Iris. 'Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch', coll. in Bradbury, ed., The Novel Today (q.v.), pp. 23-31

Murger, Henri. Vie de Bohème, introduced by Michael Sadleir (1960). Translated by Norman Cameron from Scènes de la Bohème (Paris, 1851)

Miller, Henry. Tropic of Cancer (Paris, 1935)

_____. Tropic of Capricorn (Paris 1939)

Nashe, Thomas. The Unfortunate Traveller: or, The Life of Jack Wilton (1594): ed. John Berryman (New York, 1960)

New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation, Vol.V,1, 'What is Literature?' issue (Autumn 1973)

New Review, The: A Quarterly Symposium of Literature and Criticism, Vol.V,1, Summer 1978, 'The State of Fiction - A Symposium', pp. 14-77

Nietzsche, Friedrich. See Aiken, Henry D.

Ortega Y. Gasset, Jose. The Dehumanization of Art, and Other Writings on Art and Culture, translated by Helene Weyl (Anchor Books paperback, New York 1956). First published, Madrid 1925

Poirier, Richard. The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Language of Literary Life (1971)

Richardson, Samuel. Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded, 2 vols, 1740: 1914 edn.

Russell, Bertrand. History of Western Philosophy: and its Connections with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day (1946): 1961 edn.

Sartre, J. P. Politics and Literature (1973), translated by J. A. Underwood and John Calder

Saussure, Ferdinand de. Course in General Linguistics, edited by Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Reidlinger, translated by Wade Baskin from Cours de linguistique generale (Paris, 1916)

Scholes, Robert. The Fabulators (New York, 1967)

_____., and Robert Kellog, The Nature of Narrative (New York, 1966)

_____. Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction (1974)

Sidney, Sir Philip. The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia - The Old Arcadia, ed. Jean Robertson (Oxford, 1973)

Sontag, Susan. Against Interpretation (1967)

Steiner, George. In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture (1971): Faber paperback, 1974

_____. Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966 (1967)

Sterne, Lawrence. The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy (1759-1767): ed. Graham Petrie, Penguin 1967

Strachey, Lytton. Eminent Victorians (1918)

Sutherland, J. A. Fiction and the Fiction Industry (1978)

Thackeray, William Makepeace. Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero (1847-1848): 1954 edn.

This Quarter, Vol.V, 'Surrealist Number' (September 1932), guest editor André Breton

Trilling, Lionel. Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning (1966)

_____. The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (1951)

_____. The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism (1955)

Trotsky, Leon. Literature and Revolution (New York, 1925), translated by Rose Strunsky from first Moscow 1923 edn.

Vonnegut, Kurt. Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons (Opinions) (New York, 1974): Panther 1976

Warhol, Andy. From A to B and Back Again: The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (1975): Picador, 1976

Watt, Ian. The Rise of the Novel : Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (1957): Penguin, 1963

Williams, Raymond. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (Fontana, 1976)

_____. Marxism and Literature (Oxford, 1977)

Wilson, Colin. The Outsider (1956)

ii(a) VIRGINIA WOOLF...

Woolf, Virginia. Between the Acts (1941) : Folio Society, 1974

_____. Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf, 4 vols. (1966-1969)

_____. The Common Reader (1925)

_____. The Common Reader: Second Series (1932)

_____. The Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (1977-)

_____. Flush: A Biography (1933)

_____. A Haunted House, and Other Stories (1943)

_____. Jacob's Room (1922): Uniform Edn., L. and V. Woolf, 1929

_____. Mrs. Dalloway (1925): Uniform Edn., L. and V. Woolf, 1929

_____. Night and Day (1919): Uniform Edn., L. and V. Woolf, 1930

_____. Orlando: A Biography (1928): Uniform Edn., L. and V. Woolf, 1933

_____. Roger Fry: A Biography (1940)

_____. A Room of One's Own (1929): Uniform Edn., L. and V.Woolf, 1931

_____. Three Guineas (1938)

_____. To The Lighthouse (1927): Uniform Edn., L. and V.Woolf,1930

_____, and L.S.Woolf, Two Stories (1917)

_____. The Voyage Out (1915): Uniform Edn., Land V. Woolf, 1929

_____. The Waves (1931): Uniform Edn., L. and V. Woolf, 1933

_____. A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Leonard Woolf (1953)

_____. The Years (1937)

ii(b)...AND HER CRITICS

Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf: A Biography, 2 vols (1972): Paladin paperback, 1976

_____. Bloomsbury (1968)

Fox, Stephen P. 'The Fish Pond as Symbolic Centre in Between the Acts', Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. XVIII, 3 (Autumn, 1972), pp. 467-474

Hafley, James. 'A Reading of "Between the Acts"' [sic], Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature, Vol.XIII, 3 (Summer, 1953), pp. 178-187

Majumdar, R., and A. McLaurin, eds., Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage (1975)

Morgenstern, Barry. 'The Self-conscious Narrator in Jacob's Room', Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. XVIII, 3 (Autumn 1972), pp. 351-374

Naremore, James. 'The "Orts and Fragments" in Between the Acts', Ball State University Forum, Vol. XVI (Winter 1973), pp. 59-69

Summerhayes, Don. 'Society, Morality, Analogy: Virginia Woolf's World Between the Acts', Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. IX, 4 (Winter 1963-1964), pp. 329-337

Williamson, Ann Yanko. 'A Principle of Unity in "Between the Acts"' sic., Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts, Vol. VIII, 1 (Winter 1966), pp. 53-63 (p.53)

Woolf, Leonard. Autobiography, 5 vols (1960-1969). See esp. Vol. IV, Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939 (1967)

Zorn, Marilyn. 'The Pageant in Between the Acts', Modern Fiction Studies Vol. II (1956), pp. 31-35

Nabokov, Vladimir. Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle (1969): with addition of 'Notes to Ada by Vivian Darkbloom', Penguin, 1970

_____. Bend Sinister (New York, 1947): 1972 edn

_____. The Defence (1964), translated by Michael Scammell and the author from Zaschita Luzhina (Berlin, 1930)

_____. Despair (1937), translated by the author from Otchayanie (Berlin, 1936: seralised in Sovremennye Zapiski, 54-56, Paris, 1934). Panther edn. of translation, 1969

_____. Pushkin - Eugene Onegin, 4 vols (1964)

_____. The Eye (New York, 1965), translated by Dmitri Nabokov and the author from Soglyadatay (Sovremennye Zapiski, 44, Paris, 1930). Panther edn. of translation, 1968

_____. The Gift (1963), translated by Michael Scammell, Dmitri Nabokov and the author from Dar (First published in full, New York 1952: serialised in Sovremennye Zapiski, 63-67,Paris, 1937-1938, omitting Chapter 4)

_____. Glory (1972), translated by Dmitri Nabokov and the Author from Podvig (Paris, 1933: serialised in Sovremennye Zapiski, 45-48, Paris, 1931-1932)

_____. Invitation to a Beheading (New York, 1959), translated by Dmitri Nabokov and the author from Priglashenie na Kazn' (Paris, 1938: serialised in Sovremennye Zapiski, 58-60, Paris 1935-1936). Penguin edn. of translation, 1963

_____. King Queen Knave (1968), rev. edn.,translated by Dmitri Nabokov and the author from Korol', Dama, Valet (Berlin, 1928). Panther edn. of revised translation, 1970

_____. Laughter in the Dark (Indianopolis and New York, 1938), translated by the author from Kamera Obskura (Paris, 1932). Penguin edn. of translation, 1961

_____. Lolita, 2 vols, Paris, 1955: 1959 London edn

_____. Look At The Harlequins! (New York, 1974)

_____. Mary (New York, 1970), translated by Michael Glenny and the author from Mashenka (Berlin, 1926)

_____. Pale Fire (New York, 1962): Corgi paperback, 1964

_____. Pnin (1957)

_____. The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1941): Penguin, 1964

_____. Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited (1967)

_____. Strong Opinions (New York, 1973)

_____. Transparent Things (New York, 1972)

iii(b)...AND HIS CRITICS

Appel, Alfred (Jr.). Nabokov's Dark Cinema (New York, 1974)

_____, and Charles Newman, eds. Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes (New York, 1970)

Dembo, L. S. Nabokov: The Man and His Work: Studies Edited by L. S. Dembo (1967)

Field, Andrew. Nabokov: His Life in Art (1967)

_____. Nabokov: His Life in Part (1977)

Fowler, Douglas. Reading Nabokov (1974)

Hyde, G. M. Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist (1977)

Mason, Bobbie Ann. Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to Ada (Ardis, 1969)

Rowe, William Woodin. Nabokov's Decorative World (New York, 1971)

iv(a) SAMUEL BECKETT...

Beckett, Samuel. Act Without Words (I), coll. in Endgame...(1958), q.v. translated by the author from Fin de partie, suivi de Acte sans paroles (Paris, 1957). Faber paperback edn. of translation 1964

_____. Act Without Words II, in New Departures, 1 (Summer 1959), pp. 89-90. Act Without Words I and II are also in Breath and Other Shorts, q.v., pp. 23-29 and pp. 31-35

_____. All That Fall (1957): Faber paperback, 1965. Translated from the English by Robert Pinget and the author as Tous ceux qui tombent (Paris, 1957)

_____. Breath and Other Shorts (1971): Breath was first published Gambit, Vol. IV, 16, 1969

_____. ...but the clouds..., coll. in Ends and Odds.... (1976), q.v., pp. 49-58: shown on BBC2, Spring 1977

_____. Cascando (1963): translated from the French by the author and coll. in Play and Two Short Pieces for Radio (1964) q.v., pp. 38-48

_____. Come and Go (1967), translated from the English by the author as Va et vient (Paris, 1966)

_____. Eh Joe and Other Writings (1967), translated from the English by the author as Dis Joe (Paris, 1967). Shown on BBC television, Summer 1966

_____. Embers, coll. in Krapp's Last Tape and Embers (1959), q.v. Translated from the English by the author as Cendres (1959)

_____. Endgame: Followed by Act Without Words (1958), translated by the author from Fin de partie, suivi de Acte sans paroles (Paris, 1957). Faber paperback edn. of translation, 1964

_____. Ends and Odds: Plays and Sketches (New York, 1976)

_____. Enough, coll. in No's Knife... (1967), q.v., pp. 153-159: Translated by the author from Assez (Paris, 1966)

_____. Film (screenplay), coll. in Eh Joe... (1967), q.v., pp. 29-44. Filmed in 1964, starring Buster Keaton, directed by Alan Schneider and the author

_____. First Love (1973), translated by the author from Premier Amour (Paris, 1970.) Coll. in Four Novellas (1977), q.v., pp. 7-30

_____. Footfalls (1976): also coll. in Ends and Odds (1976), q.v., pp. 31-37

_____. For to End Yet Again, and Other Fizzles (1976), translated by the author from Pour finir encore et autres foirades (1976)

_____. Four Novellas (1977). Comprising First Love (q.v.), The Expelled(translated by Richard Seaver and the author from L'Expulsé), The Calmative (translated by the author from Le Calmant), and The End (translated by Seaver and the author from La Fin.) All four novellas written 1945-1946: the last three listed were all first published in French in Nouvelles et textes pour rien (1954), q.v.

_____. Ghost Trio, coll. in Ends and Odds... (1976), q.v., pp. 39-48: shown on BBC2, Spring 1977

_____. Happy Days (New York, 1961), translated from the English by the author as Oh les beaux jours (Paris, 1963). Faber paperback edn. of original, 1966

_____. How It is (1964) translated by the author from Comment c'est (Paris, 1961)

_____. Imagination Dead Imagine (1965), translated by the author from Imagination morte imaginez (Paris, 1965)

_____. Krapp's Last Tape (Evergreen Review, 1958: coll. in Krapp's Last Tape and Embers, 1959). Faber paperback edn. 1965. Translated by Pierre Leyris and the author from the English as La dernière bande (Paris, 1960)

_____. Lessness (1970), translated by the author from Sans (Paris, 1969)

_____. The Lost Ones (1972), translated by the author from Le Dépeupleur (Paris, 1970)

_____. Dies (1956), translated by the author from Malone meurt (Paris, 1951): translation coll. in Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable (1959), q.v.

_____. Mercier and Camier (1974), translated by the author from Mercier et Camier (Paris, 1970). First written, 1946

_____. Molloy (1955), translated by Patrick Bowles and the author from Molloy (Paris, 1951): see also below

_____. Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable (also known as the Trilogy) New York, 1959. Calder edn. of translation, 1960 (wrongly dated 1959 in 1973 reprint),now in paperback

_____. More Pricks than Kicks (1934): Picador, 1974

_____. Murphy (1938): translated by the author as Murphy (Paris, 1947)

_____. No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1954-1966 (1967): 1975 reprint in Calder paperback

_____. Not I (1973): also coll. in Ends and Odds... (1976), q.v., pp. 11-20

_____, and others. Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (Paris, 1929)

_____. Ping, coll. in No's Knife... (1967), q.v., pp. 165-168: translated by the author from Bing (Paris, 1966)

_____. Play, and Two Short Pieces for Radio (1964): Faber paperback edn., 1968. Play translated from the English by the author as Comédie (Paris, 1964)

_____. Proust (1931), coll. in Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit (1965), pp. 7-93

_____. Stories and Texts for Nothing (1967), translated by the author from Nouvelles et Textes pour rien (Paris, 1954). See also Four Novellas

_____. That Time (Faber paperback, 1976). Also coll. in Ends and Odds... (1976), q.v., pp. 21-30

_____. Trilogy, The. See Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable.

_____. Unnamable, The (New York, 1958), translated by the author from L'Innomable (Paris, 1953). See Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable

_____. Waiting for Godot (1954), translated by the author from En attendant Godot (Paris, 1952). Faber paperback edn. of translation, 1965

_____. Watt (in English,but first published in Paris, 1953). Translated from the English by Agnès and Ludovic Janvier and the author (Paris, 1968)

_____. Words and Music, coll. in Play... (1964), q.v.,: broadcast on BBC radio, November 1962. Translated by the author as Paroles et musique (Paris, 1966)

iv(b) ...AND HIS CRITICS

Alvarez, A. Beckett (Fontana Modern Masters series paperback, 1973)

Bair, Deirdre. Samuel Beckett: A Biography (1978)

Beckett at Sixty: A Festscrift [no eds.], introduced by John Calder (1967)

Cohn, Ruby, ed. Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Criticism (New York, 1975)

Cunard. These Were the Hours (Illinois, 1969)

D'Aubarède, Gabriel. Interview with Beckett, in Nouvelles Littéraires Vol.I, 7 (16 February 1962), coll. in Graver and Federmann, eds., Critical Heritage (1979), q.v., pp. 215-217

Diamond, Elin. 'The Fictionalizers in Beckett's Plays', in Cohn, Samuel Beckett... (1975), q.v., pp. 111-119

Driver, Tom. Interview with Beckett, in Columbia University Forum (Summer 1961) pp. 21-25: coll. in Graver and Federman, eds., Critical Heritage (1979), q.v., pp. 217-223

The European Caravan: An Anthology of the New Spirit in European Literature, ed. Samuel Putnam, Maida Castelhun Carnton, George Reavey, and Jacob Bronowski. (New York, 1931)

Federman, Raymond. Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965)

_____, and John Fletcher. Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics (Berkeley, 1970)

Fletcher, John. The Novels of Samuel Beckett (1964)

_____. Samuel Beckett's Art (1967)

_____, Beryl Fletcher, Barry Smith and Walter Bachem, A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (1978)

Graver, Laurence, and Raymond Federman, eds. Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage (1979)

Guggenheim, Peggy. Confessions of an Art Addict (New York, 1960)

_____. [under name of Marguerite Guggenheim] Out of this Century: The Informal Memoirs of Peggy Guggenheim (New York 1946)

Janvier, Ludovic. 'Place of Narration/Narration of Place', in Cohn, Samuel Beckett... (1975), q.v., pp. 96-110

Journal of Beckett Studies, ed. James Knowlson, 1-3 (Winter 1976, Summer 1977, Summer 1978)

Kenner, Hugh. A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (1973)

_____. Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (New York, 1961: rev. edn., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968)

Kermode, Frank. Review: Encounter (July 1960), pp. 73-76, coll. in Graver and Federman, eds., Critical Heritage (1979), q.v., pp. 198-205

Mercier, Vivian. Beckett/Beckett (New York, 1977)

O'Hara, J. D. Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey, 1970)

Shenker, Israel. Interview with Beckett, New York Times, Section II, 1, 3 (5 May 1956), coll. in Graver and Federmann, eds., Critical Heritage (1979), q.v., pp. 145-159

This Quarter, Vol.V, 'Surrealist Number' (September 1932), guest editor André Breton

Whitelaw, Billy. Interviewed by James Knowlson, Journal of Beckett Studies 3 (Summer 1978), pp. 85-90

(v) SELECT LIST OF FICTIONS: THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY MOVEMENT TOWARDS SELFCONSCIOUSNESS

Apollinaire, Guillaume. Le Poète Assassiné (Paris, 1927)

Aragon, Louis. Anicet ou le Panorama, roman (Paris, 1921)

Bananas (anthology in book form), ed. Emma Tennant, art ed. Julian Rothenstein (London, 1977)

Barth, John. The End of the Road (New York, 1958)

_____. Giles Goat-Boy: or, The Revised New Syllabus (1966)

_____. Lost in the Funhouse (New York, 1968)

Barthelme, Donald. Amateurs (New York, 1976)

_____. The Dead Father (New York, 1975)

Bellow, Saùl. Herzog (New York, 1964)

_____. Mr. Sammler's Planet (1970)

Berger, John. G: A Novel (1972)

Borges, Jorge Luis. Doctor Brodie's Report (New York, 1972), translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni and the author from El informe de Brodie (Buenos Aires, 1970). Penguin edn. of translation, 1974

_____. Ficciones, 1935-1944 (Buenos Aires, 1944)

_____. Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, translated by Yates, Irby and others (New York, 1964): Penguin 1970 edn.

Brautigan, Richard. In Watermelon Sugar (San Francisco, 1968): Picador,1973

_____. Trout Fishing in America: A Novel (San Francisco,1967)

Brophy, Brigid. In Transit (1969)

Burgess, Anthony. The Clockwork Testament, or: Enderby's End (1974)

_____. Enderby Outside (1968)

_____. Inside Mr. Enderby [under pseudonym of Joseph Kell] (1963)

Burns, Alan. Dreamerika! A Surrealist Fantasy (1972)

Butor, Michel. Passing Time... (1961) translated by Jean Stewart from L'Emploi du temps (Paris, 1957)

Carter, Angela. Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces (1974)

_____. The Passion of New Eve (1977)

Cohen, Leonard. Beautiful Losers (Toronto, 1966)

Coover. Robert. Pricksongs and Descants (1971)

Donleavy, J. P. The Beastly Beatitudes of Balthazar B. (New York, 1968)

_____. The Destinies of Darcy Dancer, Gentleman (1978)

_____. The Saddest Summer of Samuel S. (New York, 1966)

Duffy, Maureen. Capital (1975)

Durrell, Lawrence. Monsieur: or,The Prince of Darkness:A Novel (1974)

_____. Nunquam: A Novel (1970)

_____. Tunc (1968)

Figes, Eva. B. (1972)

_____. Konek Landing (1969)

_____. Nelly's Version (1977)

Fowles, John. Daniel Martin (1977)

_____. The Ebony Tower (1977)

_____. The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969)

Frayn, Michael. Sweet Dreams (1973)

French, Marilyn. The Women's Room (New York, 1977)

Gide, Andre. The Counterfeiters (1931), translated by Dorothy Bussy from Les Faux-Monnayeurs (Paris, 1926). Penguin edn. of translation, 1966

Gordon, Giles. ed. Beyond the Words: Eleven Writers in Search of a New Fiction (1975)

_____. Farewell, Fond Dreams: Fictions (1975)

Grass, Gunther. The Tin Drum (1962), translated by Ralph Manheim from Die Blechtrommel (Darmstadt, 1959)

Hawkes, John. The Blood Oranges (1971)

_____. Lunar Landscapes: Stories and Short Novels (New York,1969)

Heppenstall, Rayner. Two Moons: A Novel (1971)

Higgins, Aidan. Felo De Se (1960)

Heller, Joseph. Good as Gold (1979)

_____. Something Happened (New York, 1974)

Huxley, Aldous. Point Counter Point (1928)

Johnson, B. S. Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs? (1973)

_____. House Mother Normal: A Geriatric Comedy (1971)

Jong, Erica. Fear of Flying (New York, 1973)

_____. How to Save Your Own Life (1977)

Josipovici, Gabriel. Migrations (Hassocks, Sussex, 1977)

Joyce, James. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York, 1916)

_____. Finnegan's Wake (1939)

_____. Ulysses (Paris, 1922): Penguin,1968

Le Clezio, J. M. G. The Book of Flights: An Adventure Story (1971), translated by Simon Watson Taylor from Le Livre des Fuites (Paris, 1969)

Lessing, Doris. The Golden Notebook (1962)

Lodge, David. The British Museum is Falling Down (1965)

Lowry, Malcolm. Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place (New York, 1961)

Lurie, Alison. Real People (New York, 1969)

Mailer, Norman. Why Are We in Vietnam? (New York, 1967): Panther, 1970

Mosley, Nicholas. Impossible Object (1968)

Nye, Robert. Falstaff: Being the 'Acta Domini Johannis Fastolfe', or 'The Hundred Days War', as Told by Sir John Fastolf, K. G., to his Secretaries William Worcester, Stephen Scrope, Fr. Brackley, Christopher Hanson, Luke Nanton, John Bussard, and Peter Bassett; Now First Transcribed, Arranged, and Edited in Modern Spelling by Robert Nye (1976)

O'Brien, Flann. At Swim-Two-Birds (1939)

_____. The Third Policeman (1967)

Proust, Marcel. A la recherche du temps perdu, 8 vols (Paris, 1913-1927)

Pynchon, Thomas. The Crying of Lot Forty Nine (New York, 1966)

Queneau, Raymond. Between Blue and Blue (1967), translated by Barbara Wright from Les Fleurs Bleues (Paris, 1965)

_____. Exercises in Style (1958), translated by Barbara Wright from Exercises de style (Paris, 1956)

Robbe-Grillet, Alain. Snapshots and Towards a New Novel (1965), translated by Barbara Wright from Instantanés (Paris, 1963) and Pour un nouveau roman (Paris, 1962)

Rose, Christine Brooke. Between (1968)

Roth, Philip. My Life as a Man (1974)

Salinger, J. D. For Esmé - with Love and Squalor, and Other Stories (1953)

_____. Raise High the Roof Beams, Carpenters, and Seymour, An Introduction (1963)

Sarraute, Nathalie. Between Life and Death (1970), translated by Maria Jolas from Entre la vie et la mort, (Paris, 1968)

_____. Do You Hear Them? (1975), translated by Maria Jolas from Vous les entendez? (Paris, 1972)

_____. The Golden Fruits (1965), translated by Maria Jolas from Les Fruits d'or (Paris, 1963)

_____. Tropisms, and The Age of Suspicion (1963), translated by Maria Jolas from L'Ere du soupçon (Paris, 1956) and Tropismes

Sheridan, Alan. Vacation (1969)

Simon, Claude. The Battle of Pharsalus (1971), translated by Richard Howard from La Bataille de Pharsale (Paris, 1969)

Smith, Stevie. Novel on Yellow Paper: or, Work It Out for Yourself (1936)

_____. The Holiday (1979)

Sontag, Susan. Death Kit (1968)

Stein, Gertrude. Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Writings and Lectures 1909-1945, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (1967): Penguin, 1971

Spark, Muriel. The Abbess of Crewe (1974)

_____. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961)

_____. The Public Image (1968)

_____. The Takeover (1976)

Updike, John. Bech: A Book (1970)

Vidal, Gore. Barr: A Novel (New York. 1973)

_____. Myra Breckinridge (1968)

Vonnegut, Kurt. Breakfast of Champions; or Goodbye Blue Monday! (1973).

_____. Cat's Cradle (1963).

_____. Slapstick; or,Lonesome No More! (New York, 1976)

_____. Slaughterhouse-Five; or, The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death (New York, 1969)

Waugh, Evelyn. The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold: A Conversation Piece (1957)

Weldon, Fay. Female Friends (1975)

_____. Little Sisters (1978)

West, Nathanael. The Dream Life of Balso Snell (New York, 1931)

_____. Miss Lonelyhearts (New York, 1933)

Wolfe, Tom. H. The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (1965)

_____. Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine; and Other Stories, Sketches and Essays (New York, 1976)

_____, and E. W. Johnson, eds. The New Journalism (1973): Picador, (1975)

_____. The Pump House Gang (New York, 1968)